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Unity in Diversity

Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam

Edited by

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

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PRÉFACE

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

Dans ses *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*, mais aussi dans ses *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie* et ailleurs, Hegel déclare que la problématique centrale des religions monothéistes peut se résumer en dernier lieu dans la notion d'autorité. Comment la toute-puissance et la volonté totalisante de Dieu unique et transcendant se réalisent à travers leurs possibles et multiples immanences pour en faire des autorités de différentes natures sur terre : l'autorité des hommes bien sûr, mais aussi celle des textes, des doctrines, des institutions, voire des lieux. Beaucoup plus récemment, Christian Jambet, dans son dernier ouvrage *Qu'est que la philosophie islamique ?*, soutient que l'épicentre de diverses pensées philosophiques, courants théologiques ou différentes sagesses mystiques en islam se trouve en dernière instance dans la notion de souveraineté divine. Les nombreuses modalités de compréhension de celle-ci, de sa définition, de son herméneutique et de sa concrétisation à travers les pratiques cultuelles, les doctrines, la vie politique ou encore le droit seraient à la base de la pensée philosophique en islam.

C'est dire en un mot la grande pertinence du thème du présent ouvrage collectif choisi par Orkhan Mir-Kasimov. L'importance centrale de l'autorité religieuse en islam a été relevée très tôt et elle a été étudiée de très nombreuses fois et depuis près d'un siècle et demi par un très grand nombre de savants, de Julius Wellhausen et Ignaz Goldziher jusqu'à Roy Mottahedeh, Martin Hinds ou Wilferd Madelung. Cependant, les articles composant le présent recueil offrent une certaine originalité qui, outre leur propre richesse, s'ouvrent sur de passionnantes pistes de recherches. En effet, ils concernent principalement les déclinaisons mystiques et messianiques de l'autorité religieuse, notamment dans leur relation avec les données théologiques et juridiques. Ils posent ainsi la dialectique de la normativité, ses exigences, ses limites, ses ruptures et la question vitale qu'elle fait surgir en filigrane : celle de la transgression, de la subversion et de la liberté. Le point nodal se révèle ainsi dans la complexité des rapports entre « l'orthodoxie » et « l'hétérodoxie » voire « l'hérésie ». Quelle est la doctrine droite et la doctrine déviante ? Quelle autorité est habilitée pour les déterminer et selon quels critères, quelles normes ? Encore une

fois, le sujet croise un des questionnements les plus décisifs de Hegel : le monothéisme abstrait, purement arithmétique, constitue le fondement de tout système théologico-politique totalitaire, qu'il s'agisse du domaine de l'histoire de la pensée ou celui de l'histoire tout court. Ce genre de monothéisme n'a été professé en islam que par des courants radicalement littéralistes qui, heureusement, ont toujours été minoritaires. Je dis « heureusement » car cette application du monothéisme, à part ses conséquences proprement politiques, s'oppose fondamentalement à la diversité, à la pluralité des univers intellectuels et spirituels ; elle se dit donc hostile à la circulation des idées d'origines diverses et de leur enrichissement mutuel. Bref, elle s'oppose à ce que l'on pourrait génériquement appeler la culture. Or, si on peut parler de cultures islamiques, et il y en a eu d'éblouissantes pendant de nombreux siècles et dans de nombreux endroits, c'est qu'il y eut des approches, des lectures, des compréhensions multiples, nourries par des pensées aussi bien endogènes qu'allogènes, appliquées à la notion de l'autorité religieuse et ses différents représentants, de Dieu à la figure du maître spirituel, des Ecritures saintes aux normes doctrinales et juridiques. Autrement dit, si l'islam est caractérisé, tout le long de son histoire, par une si riche diversité dans divers domaines intellectuels, spirituels et artistiques, c'est qu'il a été traversé, dès une époque ancienne, par différentes Écoles exégétiques, méthodes interprétatives, pensées herméneutiques.

Dans cet univers religieux, régi donc en dernier lieu par l'herméneutique, les courants mystiques et messianiques ont joué un rôle de premier ordre d'importance car ils ont posé, consciemment ou pas, directement ou indirectement, les jalons de quelques distinctions aussi subtiles que majeures : entre la lettre et l'esprit, entre l'Histoire et le Salut, entre la religion intérieure et les dogmes extérieurs, entre le spirituel et le politique. Les contributions savantes et originales qui composent le présent ouvrage jettent des lumières nouvelles et particulièrement utiles sur ces questions décisives.

INTRODUCTION: CONFLICTING SYNERGY OF PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN ISLAM

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

No living organism can survive without an efficient mechanism of adaptation to the changing environment. This also holds true for such complex socio-cultural organisms as religious communities and related civilizations. The survival of a religious community is closely related to the issue of religious authority. Religious authority is what initiates a religion and maintains the link with its original impulse throughout its history. No religious community can exist without some form of religious authority, which determines the principles of organization of this community so that the original impulse may be preserved and perpetuated, and which ensures the adaptation of these principles to changing historical circumstances. The central idea of the present volume can be most generally expressed by these questions: what are the concrete mechanisms of change and adaptation of religious authority in Islam, and how do they work? How did they manage to maintain Muslim civilization as a living organism through the innumerable hazards, divisions and devastations of time? Of course, my goal here is not to give a comprehensive answer to such vast questions, but to bring together some materials which, I hope, will contribute to the ongoing discussion of this topic.[1] In the next few pages, I will attempt to frame this question within a reflection on the construction of religious authority in Islam and on the relationships between

[1] It would be impossible to mention here, even briefly, the studies related to the issue of religious authority in Islam. Many works on legal doctrines and their applications, prophecy and sainthood in Islam, renewal and reform, the balance between religious and political authority, and Islamic sects and currents, are relevant to this topic. However, it is possible to mention several collective volumes articulated along the lines that seem, more or less, close to the present volume, such as *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, Paris 1982, edited by George Makdisi, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine; *Mahdisme et millénarisme en Islam*, Paris 2000, edited by Mercedes Garcia-Arenal; *Autorités religieuses en Islam*, thematic issue of the *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 49/125 (2004), edited by Marc Gaborieau and Malika Zeghal; *Sycnrétismes et hérésies dans l'orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIV^e–XVIII^e siècle)*, Leuven 2005, edited by Gilles Veinstein; *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, Leiden—Boston 2006, edited by Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke.

its various conceptions, or "patterns." I will argue that the complexity and diversity of these patterns strongly contributed to the efficient adaptation and survival of Islam as a whole. Further on, I will detail the focus and the structure of the present volume.

The original impulse that founded Islam as a religion was the revelation received by the Prophet Muḥammad. This revelation constitutes, ultimately, the only source of religious authority in Islam. Any claim on religious authority in the following periods had to prove its link with this source. From the earliest times, there emerged three fundamental approaches to the question of the preservation and the adaptation/interpretation of the original impulse of the prophetic revelation.[2] One of them, which could be characterized as "rationalist," including speculative theology and later philosophy, favored reason as the trustworthy instrument for the adequate understanding and application of the revelation and, in some cases, even as a means of an independent access to its source. Another approach was based on the idea that the influx of the revelation continued, in one form or another, after the physical death of the Prophet, which made it possible, either by means of spiritual discipline and initiation (Ṣūfism), or through the transmission of sacred knowledge along a noble bloodline (Shīʿism), to get into living contact with the source of prophetic revelation and receive prophetic or similar guidance at any point in history, either spiritually or through the intermediary of a living human person. In various formulations, this idea is essential for all forms of Islamic mysticism.[3] Mysticism so defined encompasses a broad spectrum

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[2] This division is, of course, a rough schematization. In reality, all three basic approaches to the issue of the preservation and transmission of the prophetic revelation were closely interrelated, and there were many hybrid forms. For a general idea of the diversity and complexity of religious currents within Islam see, for example, H. Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'Islam. Introduction à une étude de la religion musulmane*, Paris 1965, and J. van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere: Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*, 2 vols., Berlin—New York 2011. For a more focused presentation of particular religious currents and their mutual relationships see, for example, T. Nagel, *Geschichte der islamischen Theologie. Von Mohammed bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1994; J. van Ess, *Prémices de la théologie musulmane*, Paris 2002; T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge 2008. I am aware of the limitations of the proposed presentation, but find it useful for the sake of clarity with regard to the purpose of this introduction. Adjustments will be made in notes when necessary.

[3] For the transmission of the prophetic influx either in the form of the "Light of Muḥammad" (*nūr Muḥammadī*), or, especially in Shīʿī Islam, of the particular aptitude to receive knowledge from the experience of immediate proximity to God (*walāya*) see, for example, U. Rubin, Pre-existence and Light, Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad, in *IOS* 5 (1975), 62–119; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, Notes à propos de la *walāya* Imamite, in *idem., La religion discrète: croyances et pratiques dans l'islam shiʿite*, Paris 2006, 177–207.

of groups and movements, from moderate Ṣūfism to many forms of politically active messianism. The third, traditionist approach implied the idea that the living revelation ceased with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, and consequently stressed the rigorous transmission of the word and letter of the revelation as it took place in the time of the Prophet, that is, of the Qur'ān and of the accounts related to the pristine community, in particular those concerning prophetic words and deeds.[4]

In the centuries following the death of the Prophet, these three basic patterns of religious authority came to be combined, in various proportions depending on schools, within what can be called the "jurisprudential" pattern, which emphasized religious Law (*sharī'a*).[5] The Law came to be conceived of essentially as the means of perpetuating the prophetic model. Therefore, its application to the administration of the Muslim community in general, and of every Muslim's life in particular, ensured continuous conformity to the prophetic model and, consequently, to the principles of the prophetic revelation. Living according to the Law guaranteed one's salvation in the hereafter. The "jurisprudential" pattern drew heavily on the traditionist approach to religious authority: the Qur'ān, the Word of God, and the Tradition (*ḥadīth*), containing the accounts of the words and the deeds of the Prophet, gradually edited in canonical compilations, constituted two primary sources of the Law, religious knowledge (*'ilm*) *par excellence*.[6] Jurists (*faqīh* pl. *fuqahā'*) derived concrete principles and applications of the Law from this sacred knowledge. Therefore, the guardians and transmitters of the texts, the experts of traditional *'ilm* (*'ālim*

[4] The order is not chronological. Norman Calder, in his article, The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy, in F. Daftary (ed.), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, London—New York 2000, 66–86, 71, identifies five basic categories underlying "all possible forms of religious belief": "scripture, community, gnosis, reason, charisma". The scope and purpose of Calder's article are significantly different from that of this Introduction, and therefore I will avoid any too close parallels. However, I believe that the definition of "mysticism" above includes Calder's categories of "gnosis" and "charisma"; and there is a certain similarity between the "traditionist" pattern as described above and Calder's "scripture," and between the "rationalist" pattern and Calder's "reason".

[5] I.e. the *fiqh* as basis of the "normative interpretation of the revelation". See B. Johansen, Introduction: The Muslim *Fiqh* as a Sacred Law. Religion, Law and Ethics in a Normative System, in *idem, Contingency in a Sacred Law, Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim Fiqh*, Leiden—Boston—Köln 1999, 1–76; cf. also M.G.S. Hodgson's concept of "*Sharī'a*-mindedness," for example, in the chapter on The Shar'ī Islamic Vision, in *idem, The Venture of Islam* i, Chicago—London 1977, 315–358.

[6] In the Shī'ī tradition, the authoritative *ḥadīth* also includes the words of the historical Shī'ī Imāms.

pl. *ʿulamāʾ*) and jurists took on, within this jurisprudential paradigm, the role of bearers of religious authority.

From a functional point of view, the jurisprudential pattern proved the most efficient for the long-term administration of the Muslim community. In periods of relative stability this pattern predominated in most major communities or political formations of the Muslim world. The Sunnī configuration of the jurisprudential pattern emerged and consolidated in the Abbasid period, and was substituted for the mystical and messianic pattern that was active during the transition from the Umayyads to the Abbasids, as well as for the rationalist pattern implemented by the early Abbasid caliphs. The most important branches of the Shīʿī community, guided during the first centuries of Islam by the divinely inspired and infallible Imāms succeeding the Prophet—that is, according to the "mystical" pattern of authority as defined above—adopted, in different circumstances, versions of the jurisprudential pattern that were roughly similar to that of the Sunnī majority. This transition from the mystical to the jurisprudential pattern happened after the occultation of the twelfth Imām in the Twelver branch of Shīʿism, and was institutionalized and significantly developed after the rise of Twelver Shīʿīsm to the status of the official creed of the State under the Safavids in 907/1501.[7] In the Ismāʿīlī branch, the development of a system of jurisprudence took place soon after the foundation of the Fatimid caliphate (297/909–567/1171).[8] In the following pages, I will mostly refer to the Sunnī configuration of the jurisprudential pattern, making adjustments for other versions when necessary.

Traditionalism provided the jurisprudential pattern with two sources of the Law, the Qurʾān and the Tradition, which ensured its link with the original event of the prophetic revelation.[9] However, in changing historical circumstances, the life of the Muslim community could not be efficiently administrated by the mere reproduction of the sanctified early practice. Therefore, in addition to the Qurʾān and the Tradition, which

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[7] For the historical development of various approaches to the issue of religious authority in Twelver Shīʿism see, for example, S.A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shiʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago 1984, and D.J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*, Salt Lake City 1998.

[8] See, for example, F. Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs, Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge 1990, 249–253. On the relationship between the Fatimid and Sunnī patterns of religious authority cf. W. Madelung, A treatise on the Imāmate of the Fatimid Caliph al-Manṣūr bi-Allāh, in *Texts, Documents and Artefacts. Islamic Studes in Honour of D.S. Richards*, C.F. Robinson (ed.), Leiden—Boston 2003, 69–77.

[9] For the sources of the Law in Islam see N. Calder, Uṣūl al-fiḳh, in *EI*[2].

conveyed respectively the Word of the revelation and the model of the pristine community, the jurisprudential pattern had to integrate a legitimate mechanism of change and adaptation. Such a mechanism should make possible not only the reproduction, but also the active authoritative *production* of the Law, including its application to new cases not covered by the foundational texts. Since the prophetic revelation was the only source of religious authority in Islam, this mechanism of adaptation could be legitimate only if it was *hic et nunc* supported by the revelation, by the authority of the Prophet. From a functional point of view this meant that, outside the period of prophetic revelation, any legitimate mechanism of adaptation inherent to any given pattern of religious authority in Islam could work only if a part of this *living* revelation was extended and brought into the present of the community. The authority of the prophetic revelation could not remain entirely in the past; it had to accompany the community throughout history, providing infallible guidance in a new and changing environment. The transmission of foundational texts alone was not enough to provide an authoritative answer in new circumstances and to guarantee an efficient adaptation in accordance with the Revelation.[10]

The jurisprudential pattern provided the solution to the problem of authoritative adaptation by enhancing the two scriptural sources of the Law with a third source, the consensus (*ijmāʿ*). It was admitted that the Consensus of the Muslim community on any given issue cannot diverge from the Revelation, and has therefore the same degree of authority and infallibility as the scriptural sources. This development was further supported by the apocryphal *ḥadīth*'s attributed to the Prophet, such as: "My community shall never agree upon an error."[11] If the primary importance of the scriptural sources in the jurisprudential pattern can be viewed as the continuation of the traditionist conception of religious authority, the

[10] To some extent, the adaptation of the corpus of *ḥadīth* literature, by projecting contemporary issues back into the past and putting their solution under the authority of the Prophet, did work in the early centuries of Islam. This kind of "scriptural" adaptation was, however, seriously restricted after the establishment of the canonical *ḥadīth* compilations.

[11] On the concept of *ijmāʿ* as the source of the law see, for example, M. Bernard, Idjmāʿ, in *EI*[2]. On the Shīʿī side, the Imām already represents the principle of infallible guidance. The coexistence of *ijmāʿ* and the Imām as sources of the law is therefore problematic. In Twelver Shīʿīsm, the *ijmāʿ* is infallible only as far as it includes the opinion of the infallible Imām. See R. Brunschvig, Les *uṣûl al-fiqh* imâmites à leur stade ancien (X[e] et XI[e] siècles), in *Le Shîʿisme imâmite*, Paris 1970, 201–214, and D.J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, in particular 143–155. In Fatimid *fiqh* the authority of the Imām figured *instead* of the authority of *ijmāʿ*. See F. Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs* 252.

integration of the consensus as the third source of the Law strongly relied on rationalist methods. The consensus was, in reality, reached when all leading jurists of the community came to the same conclusion on a given issue in their independent exercise of reasoning (*ijtihād*) on the basis of scriptural sources.

From this general outline, it could be concluded that the jurisprudential pattern emerged as a synthesis of two basic patterns of religious authority mentioned in the beginning of this Introduction. To put it very roughly, the traditionist pattern ensured the preservation of the model of the pristine community, while the rationalist pattern provided the mechanism of its adaptation. What about the third, mystical pattern of authority?

Mystics were much closer to traditionists than rationalists.[12] In a sense, mysticism can be viewed as an extension of the traditionist approach to the question of religious authority and its transmission. Traditionists relied on the chain of trustworthy transmitters (*silsila*) for the transmission of religious knowledge (*ʿilm*), in the form of reports, from the source of the prophetic revelation. This chain supported (*isnād*) the authenticity of the link with the original source. Mystics did not reject this literal concept of transmission but, for them, it conveyed only the external (*ẓāhir*) aspect of the revelation. In order to realize the fullness of the religious experience, this external aspect should be matched by the internal (*bāṭin*). The reports concerning the words and acts of the Prophet should be accompanied by the transmission of some form of prophetic inspiration, which originally engendered these words and actions, and could therefore lead to their innermost meaning (*ḥaqīqa*).[13] This form of prophetic inspiration constituted the initiatory knowledge which completed and extended the traditionist concept of *ʿilm*. Consequently, the traditionist concept of *isnād/silsila* was extended to include the chain of spiritual transmission parallel to the literal one, the chain of spiritual masters, who could be physical persons or spiritual entities.[14]

This parallelism between traditionalism and mysticism provided the basis for the close interpenetration of these two currents, and the sub-

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[12] On the relationships between the traditionists, Ṣūfīs and jurists see J. van Ess, Sufism and its Opponents. Reflections on Topoi, Tribulations, and Transformations, in F. De Jong and B. Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, Leiden—Boston—Köln 1999, 22–44.

[13] The Shīʿī conception of the Revelation also includes the holy Imāms as a source of post-prophetic revelation.

[14] For the inclusion of mysticism into the "isnād paradigm," typical of traditionalism, and an extended definition of this concept, see W. Graham, Traditionalism in Islam: an Essay in Interpretation, in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23/3 (1993), 495–522.

sequent involvement of mystics into the jurisprudential pattern. The founding of the Sunnī legal schools is strongly marked by mystical motifs and, at least in Ḥanbalism, the most traditionist of them, mystical inspiration (*ilhām*) apparently was not completely excluded from the list of legal sources.[15] Many known mystics practiced as jurists, and inversely, many eminent jurists and traditionists were affiliated with some form of mysticism.

However, though the jurisprudential pattern succeeded in integrating to some extent all three basic patterns of religious authority, this integration had its limitations. The control of the preservation and adaptation of the authoritative Law was the backbone of the jurisprudential pattern. Any interference with this mechanism was perceived as vital threat not only to the jurisprudential pattern as such but, to the extent that this pattern came to dominate the life of the most of the Muslim community, to the integrity of Islam as a whole. As we have seen, the mechanism of authoritative adaptation of the jurisprudential pattern relied on the principle of *ijmāʿ* which, in a sense, made it possible to re-actualize the authority of the original prophetic revelation at any given point in history and thus guarantee the infallibility of the adaptation necessary at this point.[16] Both rationalist and mystical patterns contained alternative ways of re-actualizing the revelation: philosophers claimed that it was possible to attain the source of the prophetic revelation by means of reason, while mystical idea of continuous revelation left open the possibility of intuitive access to the same source. When these aspects of the rationalist and mystical approach interfered with the authority of *ijmāʿ*, they were vehemently rejected. Even if this contradicted, in a sense, its own need to re-actualize the prophetic revelation and use its authority for the adaptation

[15] For mystical motifs in the legitimization of the Sunnī legal schools, and in the thinking of prominent religious scholars and jurists see, for example, L. Kinberg, The Legitimization of the Madhāhib through Dreams, in *Arabica* 32/1 (1985), M. Yahia, *Shāfiʿī et les deux sources de la loi islamique*, Turnhout 2009. For Ibn Taymiyya's defence of *ilhām* see G. Makdisi, Ibn Taimīya: a Ṣūfī of the Qādiriya order, in *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1974), 118–129, 128.

[16] In practice, the jurisprudential pattern had still more flexible mechanisms of adaptation, only nominally depending on the scriptural sources. The everyday practice of the judges could be integrated into the school tradition, affecting more or less directly the construction of the Law. See W. Hallaq, The Jurisconsult, the Author-Jurist, and Legal Change, in *idem, Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law*, Cambridge 2001, 166–235; B. Johansen, Legal Literature and the Problem of Change: the Case of the Land Rent, in *idem, Contingency in a Sacred Law* 446–464.

and change in the Law, the jurisprudential pattern stated that the revelation ended with the Prophet Muḥammad.[17]

Most of hallmarks of heresy in mainstream Muslim heresiographical works, and especially such clichés as "exaggeration" (*ghuluww*) and "antinomianism" (*ibāḥa*), refer in fact to the aspects of the "continuation of the prophecy" paradigm that did not necessarily contradict the concept of religious Law itself, but certainly contradicted the jurist's monopoly on authority as the guardian of the Law. This seems to hold true for such central articles of "heresy" as any form of the doctrine of transmigration, which implied the idea of the transmission of the spiritual influx linked to the source of the revelation and its manifestation in physical persons in the course of history; related doctrines of the manifestation of the divine in humans, including the direct expression of divine speech through the tongue of an inspired mystic (*shaṭḥ*), or the abandonment of the external (*ẓāhir*) prescriptions of the Law on the pretext of perfect knowledge of their innermost meaning (*bāṭin*). The material of Tradition that could support such views was either interpreted metaphorically, declared out of reach of human reason or censured as untrustworthy.[18] Several articles in this volume demonstrate that a closer look at the doctrines and motivations of the persons and groups accused of "exaggeration" and "antinomianism" often shows that their actual divergence with the mainstream doctrines was much less than claimed by external sources. The hostility of the latter was often triggered by political, not doctrinal motivations.

It is tempting to describe this relationship between the aspects of the three basic patterns of religious authority that were integrated into the

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[17] One of the central postulates of the Sunnī paradigm of authority was a certain interpretation of the Qurʾānic expression "Seal of the prophets" (33:40 *khātam al-nabiyyīn*) applied to the Prophet Muḥammad. According to this interpretation, Muḥammad was the *last* of the Prophets, and the influx of prophecy stopped with his death. On the various interpretations of the Qurʾānic expression and on the eventual "canonization" of the equivalence "seal" = "last," underlined by the slogan "no Prophet after him" (*lā nabiyya baʿdahu*), see Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, Berkeley—Los Angeles—London 1989, especially 53–68; J. van Ess, *Prémices de la théologie musulmane* 28. A similar development took place in Twelver Shīʿīsm with the development of the doctrine of the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. See S.A. Arjomand, The Consolation of Theology: the Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shiʿism, in *The Journal of Religion* 76/4 (1996), 548–571, 556.

[18] For the Sunnī approach, in particular to the anthropomorphic traditions see, for example, D. Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme: anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens*, Paris 1997; on the censorship of Shīʿī tradition material see, for example, M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le Shiʿisme originel*, Lagrasse 1992, 33–48.

synthetic jurisprudential pattern and those rejected from it as a division between "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy." This makes sense to the extent that the jurisprudential pattern came to be central for the elaboration of the norms that governed all spheres of life of the majority of the Muslim community. Other aspects of religious authority or, at least, their active manifestations, were therefore at variance with the norm thus established. The application of the terms orthodoxy/heterodoxy to the Muslim context and its advantages, limitations and downsides have been much discussed in academic literature.[19] Without entering into this discussion, I would like to highlight one point, which, in my opinion, is particularly important with regard to the present volume. The pair "orthodoxy/heterodoxy" suggests the idea of an opposition between central "orthodoxy" with clearly defined boundaries, on the one side, and peripheral, marginal and dissident "heterodoxy," a synonym of "heresy" and "transgression," on the other. This separation into two clear-cut categories does not correspond to the reality of the Muslim community. The majority norm was by no means a homogeneous and invariable body; it evolved historically and diverged geographically. Every article in this volume will, in its own way, define what the "norm" of religious authority was in every particular case, and what brought forth the instances of its actual or potential modification. On the other hand, most of the groups, currents and thinkers discussed in this volume did not regard themselves as separated from the Muslim community. They grew within this community and were integral parts of it. Their ultimate objective was the same as that of the jurisprudential pattern of authority: to ensure the continuity of the Revelation and of the Revelation-based Law. Even if in particular historical circumstances some of them could enter into conflict with the majority paradigm and, in very few cases, fall away altogether and constitute a separate body, they essentially represented the actualization and intensification of the tendencies otherwise integrated and peacefully coexisting within the majority norm. In other words, they represent the manifestation of forces and potentials *inherent* to the complex body of Islam, not *exterior* to it.[20] Before we come

[19] See, for example, a useful discussion by M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* i, 350–351, and by J. van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere* ii, 1298–1308. For the analysis of relevant Arabic terms and their relationship to the occidental concept of "heresy" see B. Lewis, Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam, *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953), 43–63, and J. van Ess, *Les prémices*, 17–21.

[20] Cf. D.M. MacEoin, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth Century Shi'ism: the Cases of Shaykhism and Babism, in *idem, The Messiah of Shiraz*, Leiden—Boston 2009, 631–644.

to the presentation of the general structure of the volume, I would like to briefly discuss the issue of the change or modification of the established norm resulting from the interaction between different kinds of religious authority.

The conflict between various concepts of religious authority and the relationships between religious authority and political leadership divided the Muslim community immediately after the death of the Prophet. Even if jurisprudential synthesis eventually emerged from this confrontation as the majority paradigm, and achieved some degree of integration, control and tolerance with regard to other patterns of religious authority, this tolerance had, as we have seen, its limits, and the relationships between the jurists and some rationalist and mystical currents remained more or less tense, with various degrees of intensity, throughout the history of Islam.[21]

This point of view, emphasizing conflict and competition between the different forms of religious authority, reflects, however, only one aspect of their complex relationship. I would argue that there also existed another aspect, which could be defined as functional *synergy and cooperation*, often resulting—curiously enough—from this very conflict and competition. This aspect seems to have been much less highlighted, both in the primary sources—because its working can be reconstructed only from the observation and comparison of large historical periods, and the authors writing in any particular time might not be conscious of it—and (to some degree, consequently) in academic research. But if we consider the effective adaptation and survival of the Islamic community as a whole over critical periods of history, this functional synergy offers a frame for the interpretation of historical evidence.

This brings me back to the "biological" analogy with a living organism, with which I began this Introduction. In order to efficiently adapt to changing circumstances, any living organism is provided with not one but

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[21] Tolerance was probably the only attitude suitable for rallying the great majority of the Muslim community and ensuring the more or less peaceful coexistence of various tendencies. See, for example, B. Lewis, The Significance of Heresy, especially 53–55 and 57–63.On the criteria of "heresy" and "otherness" in majority Islam see J. van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere* ii, 1323–1333. J. Fück speaks of "the generosity and open-mindedness of traditionalism" ("Großzügigkeit und Aufgeschlossenheit des Traditionalismus," Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam, in *ZDMG* 93 (1939), 1–32, 27). But, beyond this functional tolerance, divergence was really appreciated only among jurists, upholders of the traditionist model of authority. The well-known prophetic utterance "Difference of opinion in my community is an act of divine Mercy" (B. Lewis, The Significance of Heresy, 53–55) was restricted to the diversity of opinions among jurists and religious scholars on legal issues. Cf. J. van Ess, *Les prémices* 23–25.

several mechanisms of adaptation. Complexity and redundancy in this case are essential to survival: when one mechanism fails, another takes its place. Arguably, several patterns of religious authority coexisting in the complex body of Islam played the role of this multi-layered mechanism of adaptation. In circumstances in which the jurisprudential pattern was severely damaged, another pattern, namely the mystical and messianic one, more or less latent under the common umbrella of the majority paradigm in the times of stability, surfaced as an independent factor and ensured the survival of the whole organism through the troubled times, eventually bringing it to the new point of stability where the proven jurisprudential pattern could be reconstructed and resumed.

Probably the best example of such a disruption of the jurisprudential pattern is the Mongol invasion. The Mongol invasion was surely one of the most severe tests that the Muslim community, or more precisely, the Eastern part of the Islamic world, had to withstand in the course of its history. The political and religious framework of the majority, Sunnī Islam, was utterly shattered. This unprecedented situation clearly reveals the potential for adaptation and survival contained in the complex structure of religious authority. The mystical and messianic perspective of religious authority proved, in these exceptional conditions, more appropriate for a rapid response and reorganization than the mechanisms of adaptation integrated into the jurisprudential pattern. While, in the jurisprudential pattern, religious authority was diffused among the body of scholars and jurists, the mystical and messianic pattern made it possible to concentrate religious authority in the hands of a single inspired person claiming a direct link with the continuous source of prophetic revelation and, therefore, of religious Law.[22] The centuries following the Mongol invasion were characterized by the consolidation and growing influence of the

[22] Again, this possibility was not in sharp opposition with the possibilities of the jurisprudential pattern itself. The provisional concentration of considerable religious authority in the hands of a single person is potentially contained, for example, in the concept of "renovator" (*mujaddid*), and was realized at various degrees of intensity throughout history, including by prominent religious scholars and jurists. On the concept of *mujaddid* see Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous* 94–101. Moreover, the personal *ijtihād* of the jurist contained a certain potential for charismatic evolution. The roots of this potential lie probably in the early discussion on the prophetic *ijtihād* and its relationship with the revelation. On this topic cf., for example, E. Chaumont, La problématique classique de l'Ijtihâd du prophète: Ijtihâd, Waḥy et ʿIṣma, *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), 105–139, and M. Yahia, *Shāfiʿī et les deux sources de la loi islamique*, especially 349, 417–424. The evolution of the jurist's charisma was probably most spectacular in Iranian Shīʿism. On this evolution, see J. Calmard, *Mardjaʿ-i taḳlīd*, in *EI*[2].

Ṣūfī networks and individual Ṣūfī shaykhs, by a rapprochement between Shīʿism and Ṣūfism, and by the emergence of messianic movements, sometimes with complex universalist doctrines combining Sunnī, Ṣūfī and Shīʿī features with a clearly expressed claim of religious and political authority. These movements were often described, in "orthodox" sources, as antinomian, i.e. transgressing the religious law of Islam. However, the first-hand evidence often shows that, from a functional point of view, the doctrinal production of Ṣūfī and messianic leaders of this time was directed essentially towards the same goal as that of the jurists: they attempted to adapt and re-interpret the Law and find a configuration suitable for the new and rapidly evolving environment. It was not so much *what* they did but *how* they did it that disturbed the jurists and, most of all, the emergence to the forefront of the claim of a direct link with the source of the Law, the straightforward manifestation of the "continuation of the prophecy" perspective, which interfered with the mechanism of religious authority that was fundamental for the jurisprudential pattern.

The messianic claim can arguably be described as the extreme part of the "continuation of the prophecy" spectrum inherent to the mystical pattern of religious authority. Islamic messianism is rooted in a more or less well defined corpus of traditions and beliefs related either to the millennial "renovation of the religion" (*tajdīd al-dīn*), or to the events of the end of time and the eschatological Savior.[23] The eschatological or millennial claim has some specific features that can potentially endow the messianic leader with almost unlimited authority, and are particularly important for understanding the role of messianism in the post-Mongol period and its consequences. First, it refers to special historical conditions (the turn of the millennium or the end of time) which, in accordance with generally admitted beliefs, make possible the appearance of a divinely guided justifier or Savior, expected to restore the purity of Islam and of the religious Law.[24] In its eschatological form, the messianic claim

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[23] For different kinds of "saviors" or "renovators" in Islam see the introduction of M. Garcia-Arenal to *Mahdisme et millénarisme en Islam* 7–16, and Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous* 94–101. For the material of the Muslim apocalyptic tradition, see D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton 2002.

[24] This seems to be the perspective of most messianic movements in Islam, both Sunnī and Shīʿī. However, the Muslim eschatological tradition contains some degree of ambiguity concerning the religion of the eschatological Savior. For example, some traditions mention the "new book, new order, new Sunna" brought by the Savior, which raises the question of whether he will restore Islam or bring a new religion. Both options were addressed, by various messianic groups and movements, throughout history. See the relevant articles in this volume.

involved a tremendous, outright or partial prophetic religious authority of divinely guided figures and/or prophets whose appearance at the end of time is generally recognized and embedded in the eschatological beliefs of the Muslim community. Second, the messianic claim implied the idea of universalism, of the unification of the Muslim community. The unification of the community in the restored purity of Islam was one of the central tasks of the expected Savior. In some manifestations of Islamic messianism, this universalist thrust was extended to other religions as well: the Savior had to restore the universal message of Islam, which was originally addressed to all mankind. Third, by its nature, the messianic claim was associated with political and social activism.

Along with the universalist tendency and political involvement proper to its messianic component, the mystical pattern of religious authority, based on the concept of direct access to the source of revelation, or the spiritual transmission of prophetic knowledge and investment, played a central role in the consolidation of the concept of charismatic and messianic kingship, successfully implemented by Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. However, soon after the establishment of a stable political configuration, the rulers had to adapt a less dynamic and more controlled pattern of authority. At this point, the mystical and messianic pattern ceded its place to reformed versions of the proven jurisprudential configuration.[25] The crisis was overcome, and the Muslim community entered a new era.

Structure of the Volume

This volume is focused essentially on the mystical and messianic pattern of religious authority and its interactions with the jurisprudential pattern as a factor of change and evolution in Islam. The contributions are divided into three parts, entitled "Languages, Concepts and Symbols," "Post-Mongol Tendencies: Mysticism, Messianism and Universalism," and "From Mysticism and Messianism to Charismatic Kingship: Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals." This division is necessarily very tentative and cannot fully reflect the rich network of interconnections and mutual references

[25] This passage from the mystical and messianic pattern of religious authority, which was used to mobilize the support of the masses during the period of the struggle for power, to the jurisprudential pattern more suitable for the long-term perspective, recalls the similar evolution that took place in the course of the Abbasid revolution.

between contributions. In the following I will briefly outline the structure and the contents of every part.

The first part brings together contributions dealing, very broadly, with the languages of expression, characteristic themes and symbols of mystical and messianic discourse related to the issue of religious authority, which might be at variance with the jurisprudential "norm." Two contributions in this part directly address the issue of language and its relationship with religious authority. Pierre Lory shows, with the example of the well-known mystic Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), that ecstatic mysticism and its paradoxical language of direct inspiration (*shaṭḥ*) was not incompatible with the strictest observance of religious Law and full adherence to the theological and legal concepts of mainstream Islam. A mystic uttering a *shaṭḥ* could be charged with exaggeration and antinomianism only if the gradation of mystical experience and the corresponding gradation of languages were not taken into consideration. The *shaṭḥ* can be perceived as blasphemy if the speaker and the listener are situated on different levels of language. But if they are synchronized, the *shaṭḥ* can illustrate the positions of the most "orthodox" Ashʿarī theology. While a language of direct experience proper to mysticism, such as *shaṭḥ*, can be reconciled with the mainstream theological and jurisprudential pattern of authority, the inverse evolution is also possible. Todd Lawson studies the emergence of the discourse of religious authority in the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* of ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb (d. 1850), a work belonging, as its title shows, to the genre of Qurʾānic commentary, one of the most fundamental forms of expression of the "orthodox" jurisprudential pattern. However, under the pen of the Bāb, the language of *tafsīr* reasserts the traditional Shīʿī concept of *walāya*, the basis for the charisma of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and subsequent Shīʿī Imāms, as a source of supreme religious authority. The two following chapters introduce interrelated concepts that are fundamental for the mystical and messianic pattern of religious authority. Daniel De Smet discusses the place and exact scope of the doctrines of transmigration of the soul in Ismāʿīlī thought, comparing the evidence from the works of two prominent authors, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 360/971) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020). The issue of transmigration was one of the central points of anti-Ismāʿīlī polemics, and groups suspected of "antinomian" or "exaggerator" tendencies were extensively accused of this. However, a closer look at the sources shows, in particular, that this concept covered a highly elaborate and complex part of eschatology, developed in the search for a solution to the question of Resurrection in the end of time, one of the central issues of Muslim theology in general.

The approaches to the issue of transmigration varied significantly from one thinker to another, and did not necessarily diverge from the mainstream view to the extent implied in the term *tanāsukh* used indistinctively as a hallmark of utter heresy. The chapter by Armin Eschraghi deals with the evolution of the concept of Mahdī, the eschatological Savior, in Twelver Shīʿī and Bahāʾī interpretations. A central concept of the messianic part of the mystical pattern of religious authority in general, and in Twelver Shīʿīsm in particular, the figure of Mahdī gradually fades away as Bahāʾism establishes itself as an independent faith. Both concepts, transmigration and Mahdī, will reappear, in various contexts, in several chapters of the second and third parts of this volume. In the fifth chapter of this part, Omid Ghaemmaghami undertakes a thorough study on the interpretations of the theme of Green Island in Twelver Shīʿī, Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahāʾī sources. The Green Island is the dwelling place of the hidden Imām, and therefore a powerful symbol of direct contact with the source of religious authority. Many issues mentioned in the contributions included in this part are echoed in later chapters.

The second part opens with a chapter by William Tucker, which summarizes common features between the early Kūfan "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*) and post-Mongol mystical and messianic movements. The heritage of the *ghulāt* is an important factor in the constitution of the mystical and messianic pattern of religious authority in general. More particularly, the similarity between the views attributed to the early *ghulāt* and the doctrines of post-Mongol mystical and messianic movements has been stressed by many scholars. However, the scarcity of available evidence makes it difficult to trace the concrete channels of transmission. The *ghulāt* are mentioned in many chapters of this volume. William Tucker's panoramic article thus provides a necessary frame of reference. Devin DeWeese analyzes the evolution of religious authority related to the intercessory power attributed to the eminent shaykhs in Ṣūfī communities belonging to the Yasawī and Kubrawī traditions in 14th and 15th centuries. Without reaching the intensity of an outright messianic claim, the Ṣūfī shaykhs, in the competition for social and political influence, come close to claims of a very high, sometimes quasi-prophetic, degree of religious authority. In many cases, this tendency is corroborated by the additional emphasis that is placed on direct revelation, an aspect of the mystical pattern of authority that in other times remained more or less latent in institutionalized Ṣūfism behind a more moderate kind of legitimization through transmission (*silsila*). From this point of view, messianic movements of the post-Mongol period can be seen as an extreme part of the spectrum

of interpretations of religious authority in Ṣūfism. In addition to their central focus, these two chapters introduce a contextual background which contributes to the better understanding of the following chapters of this part, which deal with various aspects of messianism and universalism in Timurid Iran. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov explores, on the basis of early Ḥurūfī works, the aspects of Ḥurūfī prophetology, which arguably underlie a project to build a bridge between "orthodox" Sunnī prophetology and the Shīʿī concept of charismatic Imāms. This interpretation of the Ḥurūfī concept of "motherly" prophets and saints (*ummiyyūn*) is in line with a more general tendency, supported by further evidence from the Ḥurūfī works, toward the unification of the Muslim community in accordance with traditional Muslim eschatological expectations. Matthew Melvin-Koushki analyzes the place of metaphysics based on the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the letters of the alphabet, closely associated with the millenarian and universalist tendencies characteristic of this period, in the thought of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn ʿAlī Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432). The metaphysics of letters appears here as the most appropriate way to attain, or to actualize, the highest possible level of knowledge, that of the saintly Shīʿī Imāms and of the Prophet himself. In other words, the metaphysics of letters seems to provide a possibility of direct access to the source of revelation, the source of absolute religious authority. The chapter by Evrim Binbaş shows, through the example of the Timurid prince Mīrzā Iskandar (d. 818/1415), how the pattern of religious authority based on the idea of direct access to the source of the prophetic revelation, actualized and theoretically developed in post-Mongol mystical and messianic milieus, as well as the doctrinal basis and universalist worldview underlying this pattern, began to be mobilized and used by the ruling classes to legitimate and extend their claims to political leadership. Although Mīrzā Iskandar was not able to take full advantage of the conjunction of mystical and messianic doctrines with actual political power, he had rightly foreseen the model of charismatic and messianic kingship that could be legitimated through such a synthesis. This model was more successfully exploited by the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals.

This brings us to the third and last part of the volume focused on the role of the mystical and messianic pattern of religious authority and its relationships with jurisprudential "orthodoxy" in the emergence and consolidation process of the great Empires, which marks the beginning of the new era in the history of Islam. Paul Ballanfat's chapter focuses on the relationships between the institutionalized mysticism, providing the legitimization for the political system in its construction of conventional

"normativity" in an Ottoman context, and other forms of spirituality with different conceptions of religious Law. The integration of mysticism into the spheres of power, tending to restore the jurisprudential pattern of authority, introduces a new balance between such concepts as orthodoxy/heterodoxy, true faith/transgression. The persecution of the Melāmīs is particularly interesting in the light of this process of constructing "official" mysticism and its separation from the forms of spirituality that cannot be used by political power as a source of legitimization. The Melāmīs were rejected not because of any messianic or political claims, or clearly expressed divergence with the established religious norm, but because their discourse thoroughly escaped any possible description and categorization that would make it possible to situate them within the officially recognized structure of "controlled" mysticism. The theme of the opposition between institutionalized Ṣūfism and mystical groups, referred to as *Abdalān-i Rūm*, is also central to Ahmet Karamustafa's chapter. Viewed from the angle of linguistic practice, this opposition appears as a dissociation between the form of spirituality conveyed by the means of vernacular Turkish and "metropolitan" Ṣūfism expressed in Arabic, Persian or elite Ottoman Turkish, languages of conventional Islamic learning and authority. Kaygusuz Abdal, one of the most fascinating figures of "vernacular" Ottoman mysticism, exemplifies the idea of the predominance of personal, direct spiritual experience over conventional regulations, typical of the mystical pattern of religious authority. He combined a deep interiorization of Islamic religious precepts with the *melāmī* rejection of any ostentatious manifestation of piety. Opposed to the jurisprudential pattern of a "metropolitan" religious institution, the "vernacular" mystical current regarded itself as the true essence of Islam. "Vernacular" *abdal* piety was arguably an important factor in the shaping of the communities known today under the name of Alevis/Bektashis. It is interesting that, in the Ottoman context, the Bektashi order assumed the regulating role of an intermediary between the "vernacular" mystical pattern and "established" official Islam. Shahzad Bashir's chapter, focused on characteristic Safavid headgear, is framed by a more general reflection on the function of symbols within religious systems, and their capacity to express changes and modifications. It is therefore strongly relevant as well for the first part of this volume. Safavid headgear symbolizes, in particular, the Safavid charismatic and messianic conception of religious authority. The *Ṭarīq al-irshād* of Hāshim b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Najafī that is studied in this chapter develops this symbolic dimension of the headgear, an omnipresent material object, into a complex theological system

designed to legitimate the historical change represented by the emergence of the Safavid dynasty. The next two chapters take us into Mughal India. Abbas Amanat examines the role of the Nuqṭawīs in creating the doctrine of "universal conciliation," part of the "divine religion" (*Dīn-i Ilāhī*) formulated during the rule of Akbar. The Nuqṭawīs, an offshoot of the Ḥurūfīs mentioned in the second part, possessed a well developed theoretical basis to support both the concept of infallible sacral kingship, "a reflection of divine authority," which made possible the authoritative formulation of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*, and the universalist, ecumenical and millenarian worldview essential to its central doctrine of "universal conciliation." A millenarian and messianic impetus fostered the shaping of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* on principles diverging from those underlying the jurisprudential pattern of Sunnī "orthodoxy." From this point of view, the comparison of the pattern of religious authority represented by the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* with the contemporary (and conflicting) Sunnī Ṣūfī millenarian tendency, represented most vividly by the Mujaddidī branch of the Naqshbandiyya, founded by Aḥmad Sirhindī, is particularly interesting. Azfar Moin focuses on the anti-Akbarian discourse of ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī (d. *ca.* 1023/1614–5). A closer look at Badāʾūnī's works shows that his criticism of Akbar's construction of religious authority, however, using the standard topoi of the Sunnī heresiographical tradition, did not straightforwardly imply a return to the strict Sunnī "orthodox" pattern. Like Aḥmad Sirhindī, Badāʾūnī accepted the necessity of millennial change, but rejected the messianic claim of Akbar in favor of the messianic claims of Ṣūfī masters such as Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, eponym of Nūrbakhshiyya, and Muḥammad of Jawnpur, leader of the Mahdawīs.

The primary concern in the arrangement of the chapters was the logical coherence of the whole; therefore thematic and chronological principles of organization have been privileged over alphabetical ones. The chapters of the first part are organized in accordance with its title: "Languages" is followed by "Themes" and "Symbols." Within each subdivision, the order is chronological. The second part opens with two panoramic articles. A comparative perspective on the early *ghulāt* is followed by an analysis of the evolution of Ṣūfism in 14th and 15th centuries. The chapters by Matthew Melvin-Koushki and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov both deal with the theoretical aspects of mystical and messianic thought in the Timurid period. Alphabetical order is reversed here essentially because the former refers to the Ḥurūfīs, who are introduced in the latter. The chapter by Evrim Binbaş which, like the two preceding chapters, concerns the intellectual history of Timurid Iran, is placed at the end of this part because it describes the emergence of the model of sacral messianic kingship, and

represents thus an ideal introduction to the third part. The order of chapters in the third part follows the order of emergence of the imperial dynasties: Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal.

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[26] The first publication, *Les Nuṣayris et les Druzes, deux communautés ésotériques à la périphérie doctrinale de l'islam*, edited by Daniel De Smet and myself, appeared as a thematic issue of *Arabica* 58/1–2 (2011).

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PART ONE

LANGUAGES, CONCEPTS AND SYMBOLS

LA TRANSGRESSION DES NORMES DU DISCOURS RELIGIEUX : REMARQUES SUR LES *SHAṬAḤĀT* DE ABŪ BAKR AL-SHIBLĪ

Pierre Lory

> On questionna Shiblī sur le sens du verset « Il y a bien là un rappel pour qui a un cœur, et écoute en étant témoin » (Q. 50:37). Il répondit : « Celui qui a un cœur, c'est celui dont Dieu est le coeur »[1]

La portée des locutions paradoxales en mystique musulmane, les *shaṭaḥāt*, a attiré l'attention des chercheurs depuis près d'un siècle. On se souvient des remarques pionnières de Louis Massignon, dès 1922[2]. Henry Corbin y a apporté des éléments décisifs sur la dimension métaphysique du *shaṭḥ* comme discours nécessairement équivoque. Après avoir rappelé qu'en mystique musulmane, lorsqu'un message de l'ordre du sur-naturel, du caché (*ghayb*), cherche à se traduire en langage humain, celui-ci devient inévitablement équivoque (*mutashābih*), Corbin poursuit : « L'apparence (du discours) n'est pas le *vrai sens*, mais le vrai sens, l'ésotérique, ne peut être signifié sans cette apparence. Or l'*expression de l'inexprimable*, c'est cela le *paradoxe* par excellence »[3]. Nous adoptons ici sa traduction de *shaṭḥ* par « paradoxe inspiré ». Le terme « paradoxe », note H. Corbin, signifie étymologiquement : ce qui est contraire à l'opinion commune[4]. Il renvoie donc à la première transgression qui puisse être, celle du langage commun. Le paradoxe représente en effet une rupture avec le discours religieux ordinaire, mais aussi par rapport au discours « technique » du soufisme. Ce qui était reproché à Ḥallāj par les mystiques contemporains n'est pas d'avoir parlé « faux », mais d'avoir opposé une parole ésotérique au discours commun, au lieu de maintenir à leurs niveaux propres le *ẓāhir*

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[1] Cité par Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 128, et Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 372 ; suivi du vers : « Tourné vers Toi, mon cœur est vide de sens / chacun de mes membres est un cœur, tourné vers Toi ».

[2] Massignon, *Essai* 119 : « Au terme, le mystique attentif saisit en toute phrase, en toute action, même la plus minime en apparence, le sens anagogique (*moṭṭalaʿ*), un appel divin […] et au seuil de l'union mystique, intervient le phénomène du *shaṭḥ*, l'offre de l'échange, l'interversion amoureuse des rôles est proposée ; l'âme soumise est invitée à vouloir, à exprimer, sans s'en douter, « à la première personne », le point de vue même de son Bien-Aimé ; c'est l'épreuve suprême de son humilité, le sceau de son élection ».

[3] Dans Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt*, Intr. 14.

[4] *Ibid.* 15.

et son *bāṭin*. A la suite de ces premières publications, la monographie de Carl Ernst *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* a jeté les bases d'une réflexion globale de ce phénomène dans le monde musulman pris dans son ensemble, jusqu'à l'Inde et Indonésie, et dans l'histoire du soufisme jusqu'à l'époque moderne non comprise. Enfin, soulignons la portée décisive de l'article de Paul Ballanfat « L'approche de la mort dans l'ivresse du discours mystique : les fondements du paradoxe » (1997)[5]. Il y analyse les fondements spirituels et métaphysiques de ce type de discours mystique lors des premiers siècles hégiriens, ainsi que l'abandon progressif du *shaṭḥ* des origines par un soufisme cadré socialement par les ordres confériques, borné théologiquement par les positions de Ghazālī et marginalisé à l'intérieur même de la doctrine par le système d'Ibn ʿArabī. Ce dernier évacua le paradoxe comme base de l'expérience pour en faire une forme occasionnelle du discours extatique, assez suspecte du reste. Or les *shaṭaḥāt* méritent que l'on revienne sur leur portée. Ils ne furent pas un phénomène marginal dans la mystique musulmane classique. Ils y surgirent assez tôt[6]. Le *shaṭḥ* fut perçu dans la tradition soufie comme un type de discours construit, repérable, ayant sa logique propre, comme en témoignera le très précieux *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt* de Rūzbihān Baqlī.

Nous voudrions revenir sur le rôle de ces fameuses outrances afin de les situer par rapport à la question de la normativité. Partons d'une évidence : le *shaṭḥ* n'est transgresseur que par rapport à celui qui le reçoit. La transgression suppose la préexistence d'une règle clairement acceptée par le consensus social ou imposée par un pouvoir coercitif. Dépasser par paradoxe un point de foi, de loi, de morale de l'islam peut donc être regardé comme une transgression, mais seulement si le dogme est nettement admis dans sa formulation, noué à ce qui constitue un fondement pour la Loi de la communauté. D'où l'importance de repérer les différentes positions de départ des jugements et condamnations à l'encontre des paradoxes. Ils sont venus d'horizons différents : lettrés de tendance ḥanbalite[7],

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[5] *BEO* 49 (1997), 21–49.

[6] Paul Nwyia fait remonter le plus ancien exemple de ces paradoxes à Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (m. 148/765), à partir d'un passage étonnant de son commentaire coranique (*Exégèse* 156–188). Les paroles rapportées de Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (m. 185/801) fournissent déjà des exemples frappants de « paradoxes inspirés ».

[7] On pense bien sûr à Ibn ʿAqīl ou à Ibn al-Jawzī. A ce sujet, v. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy* 117–130. A noter que Ibn al-Jawzī, comme Ibn Taymiyya ou Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, étaient affiliés à un courant soufi modéré.

théologiens[8], mais aussi ascètes[9] et soufis[10]. Face à un public large, la tradition soufie a tâché de justifier ces 'outrances' en minimisant leur portée. La définition de Sarrāj et le chapitre du *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* qu'il leur consacre[11] sont ici des textes fondateurs. Sarrāj reconnaît qu'il y a excès, outrance. Etymologiquement le terme de *shaṭḥ* évoque le mouvement, le débordement (*ḥaraka, fayḍ*). Sarrāj cherche à prouver que les soufis ne s'opposent pas au dogme, mais qu'ils ont une approche de la foi qui leur est propre. Surtout, il insiste sur le fait que ces propos ont été dits à l'état d'extase, hors de contrôle d'eux-mêmes[12]. Ce dernier point – qui donc parle dans le *shaṭḥ* – est central bien entendu, nous y reviendrons.

Cependant, toutes ces locutions ne furent pas énoncées sous le coup de l'état d'ivresse, hors du contrôle du locuteur. De nombreux témoignages indiquent que certaines ont certainement été prononcées « à froid », dans le but pédagogique d'ébranler les certitudes naïves du disciple, de l'interlocuteur. Il s'agissait d'un type de discours initiatique ayant sa spécificité. Le recueil de Rūzbihān montre que même des mystiques réputés « sobres » ont prononcé des *shaṭaḥāt*[13]. Rūzbihān souligne le fond de la question : c'est le rapport de Dieu à la créature qui est paradoxal, et fonde le *shaṭḥ*. La condition de l'être humain est ancrée dans l'équivoque (*iltibās*), car

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[8] Pour ce qui concerne les Muʿtazilites, voir Sobieroj, The Muʿtazila and Sufism 68–92. Notons ici le cas particulier de Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Sālim (m. 356/967) dont les objections aux *shaṭaḥāt* sont rapportées par Sarrāj (*Lumaʿ* 472 s. ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 531 s.). Elles sont intéressantes, émanant d'un théologien ascète et très imprégné de mystique.

[9] Comme le cas de Ghulām Khalīl et du procès qu'il intenta aux soufis en 266/878. V. van Ess, Sufism and its Opponents 26–28.

[10] Déjà, Sarrāj mentionnait les commentaires de Junayd aux paroles de Basṭāmī (*Lumaʿ* 459 s., 479). Ibn ʿArabī, lui, voit le *shaṭḥ* comme une énonciation sincère, mais immature, de l'extatique débutant (v. *Futūḥāt* ii, 387, *Bāb fī maʿrifat al-shaṭḥ* ; et *ibid.* ii, 232).

[11] « Le *shaṭḥ* est un discours traduisant verbalement l'extase jaillissant de son Origine, accompagnée de prétention personnelle, à moins que celui qui la prononce ne soit ravi à lui-même et préservé (du péché) » (*Lumaʿ* 422). Selon Sarrāj, il s'agit donc bien d'un discours (*kalām*), c'est-à-dire d'un ensemble structuré de paroles donnant un sens. Ce discours traduit en langage humain (*lisān*) une expérience ineffable venant d'une autre dimension. Il peut se pervertir par une prétention égocentrique à partager quelque chose de divin, à moins que celui qui la prononce en soit innocent en étant absent à son propre ego au moment où il parle. Cette définition est développée plus loin par Sarrāj *Lumaʿ* 453 s. V. aussi Ballanfat, Approche de la mort 22.

[12] L'idée est reprise dans des termes voisins par Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 57 (texte persan), trad. en français par Corbin dans l'introduction 9.

[13] Ainsi, par example, Junayd (*Shaṭḥiyyāt* 158–162) ou Sahl Tustarī (*ibid.* 206–213). Pour Rūzbihān, les exemples premiers de *shaṭḥ* sont à trouver dans le Coran et le ḥadīth, dès lors que Dieu S'attribue des qualifications en langage humain (v. Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 57–58, texte persan ; trad. française de H. Corbin 10–12).

il vit et pense à la limite entre l'océan des lumières divines, et l'obscurité univoque du monde sensible. Le *shaṭḥ*, doit donc être étudié dans le cadre qui est le sien : qui parle à ce moment ? De quoi fait-il état ? A qui s'adresse-t-il ? A partir de là s'éclairera la portée de l'éventuelle transgression contenue dans ces paroles.

Afin de ne pas rester à un niveau trop général dans les considérations sur le *shaṭḥ*, nous voudrions repérer dans la mesure du possible comment il 'fonctionne' dans le discours général d'un maître spirituel précis, connu et reconnu. Les propos attribués à Basṭāmī sont fondateurs, mais la vie de ce personnage est bien légendaire et les propos transmis de lui trop décontextualisés. La figure de Ḥallāj, déjà étudiée dans le détail par L. Massignon, se trouve de plus très prisonnière d'enjeux politiques et dogmatiques, non mystiques. Nous nous proposons ici d'étudier des dires d'Abū Bakr al-Shiblī. Chez lui, le *shaṭḥ* tient une place considérable : Sarrāj consacre une section entière de ses *Lumaʿ* à ses *shaṭaḥāt*[14] ; et le recueil de Rūzbihān a retenu vingt-deux paradoxes issus de lui. Mais pour autant, Shiblī n'a jamais cessé d'être considéré comme un grand maître, et sa descendance spirituelle est considérable.

Le peu que nous savons de la biographie de Shiblī indique que son parcours de vie n'est pas étranger à son discours et au caractère paradoxal de son enseignement. Issu d'une famille de hauts fonctionnaires originaires d'Asie Centrale mais vivant au Proche-Orient où il naquit en 247/861, Shiblī est un véritable converti. Il vécut sa jeunesse à Baghdad, où son père était haut fonctionnaire dans l'appareil d'état abbasside. Il bénéficia d'une bonne formation en ḥadīth et en *fiqh* malékite, et travailla comme son père au service du régent Muwaffaq. Sa conversion fut remarquée, car la majorité des Soufis de cette époque étaient d'origine plus modeste – issus notamment des milieux d'artisans et de commerçants urbains[15]. Son entrée dans la vie soufie fut tardive[16] et radicale, car il abandonna sa carrière de fonctionnaire pour entrer dans le cercle de disciples de Khayr al-Nassāj. Il distribua tous ses biens aux pauvres ; à la fin de sa vie – il mourut en 334/945 – il ne laissa strictement rien à ses propres héritiers. Sa conversion représente donc un complet retournement d'ordre social.

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[14] *Lumaʿ* 478–491.

[15] Comme en témoignent fréquemment leurs noms : Ḥallāj, le cardeur ; Nassāj, le tisserand ; Khazzāz, le marchand de soieries ; Muzayyin, le coiffeur, etc.

[16] Comme le note Massignon (Passion i, 124), les contradictions dans les données transmises rendent difficile à déterminer la date de cette conversion ; mais il a pu avoir quarante à ce moment.

On raconte qu'il brûla des beaux vêtements qu'il avait portés. De même, il distribua en aumônes la totalité d'une transaction immobilière sans rien laisser pour ses propres héritiers. Il se trouva des contemporains pour protester : « Cela est une transgression de la morale enseignée (*ʿilm*). Le Prophète a interdit de gaspiller l'argent. Sur quelle autorité (*imām*) justifie-t-il de donner tout aux gens et de ne rien laisser à ses enfants ? ». Face à ses détracteurs, Shiblī tira argument de l'exemple du roi Salomon sacrifiant ses chevaux après que sa passion pour eux lui aurait fait négliger une prière – selon certains exégètes[17]. Il justifia aussi ses dons en excipant de l'exemple d'Abū Bakr abandonnant tous ses biens pour suivre le Prophète, et ne laissant à ses enfants que « Dieu et son Envoyé »[18]. Nous avons affaire ici à de véritables *shaṭaḥāt* en acte. Il s'agit en effet d'actes para-doxaux, contraires à la *doxa* de la société ambiante. Mais Shiblī les justifie en se réclamant du Coran et de l'exemple des Compagnons du Prophète – c'est-à-dire précisément sur ce qui fonde la norme de la pensée et du comportement en Islam. On voit bien qu'il ne s'agit pas d'actes ou de paroles effectués sous l'emprise de l'extase, mais posés de façon délibérée. Par eux, Shiblī pointe ainsi le caractère foncièrement équivoque de la responsabilité du croyant devant Dieu. L'allégeance à un Maître divin illimité ne doit-on pas entraîner un engagement lui aussi illimité ? Mais cet engagement il-limité ne risque-t-il pas alors d'outrepasser les limites, les normes, de la société ?

Shiblī a aussi suggéré le caractère paradoxal du savoir en matière de religion. Il a en effet abandonné une formation intellectuelle reconnue. Il racontait lui-même qu'il avait étudié le *fiqh* pendant trente ans « jusqu'à ce que l'aurore se lève. Je me rendis alors auprès de tous ceux auprès de qui j'avais pris des notes et demandai : je veux le savoir sur Dieu (*fiqh Allāh*). Mais aucun ne me répondit »[19]. En effet : à quoi correspond un savoir religieux qui n'est aucunement un savoir sur Dieu, qui n'apprend rien sur Lui ? Le *fiqh* détaille la volonté divine sur les hommes, mais cette volonté ne trahit rien du mode d'être divin, ni comment il peut véritablement rencontrer le mode d'être humain. Shiblī suggère ici que c'est

[17] Il s'agit du commentaire du verset coranique 38:31–33. Ces récits sont donnés sous diverses variantes par Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 483–484 ; Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 373–374 ; Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 258–263 ; Shaʿrānī, *Tabaqāt* i, 105. Selon Munāwī, *Kawākib* i, 555, ces destructions de vêtement étaient « une habitude » (*kānat ʿādatu-hu* …). Noter que le gaspillage excessif est assimilé à une maladie mentale dans le droit musulman.

[18] Sarrāj *Lumaʿ* 483 ; Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 261–263. A noter qu'un récit analogue est attribué à Nūrī.

[19] Sarrāj *Lumaʿ* 487 ; Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 248–249, 275.

la limitation volontaire de la science livresque, l'ignorance délibérée et assumée des oulémas qui constitue un paradoxe outrancier – et non l'aspiration du soufi vers l'origine de toute vie.

Shiblī fréquenta les grands mystiques de son époque. Ainsi Junayd, dont il devint un proche[20]. Il s'ensuivit une première série de rencontres souvent incongrues. Shiblī représente une forme de mystique extatique, bien différente de celle du *Sayyid al-ṭā'ifa* : un antitype pourrait-on dire, représenté par maintes anecdotes. Sarrāj consacre une section, *bāb*[21], à cette confrontation entre les deux hommes. Les récits nous montrent Shiblī débordé par sa propre émotivité, sous le choc d'un *ḥāl*, d'une commotion spirituelle lui faisant oublier le contexte de sa vie matérielle, éventuellement repris et corrigé par Junayd. Ainsi raconte-t-on que Shiblī se rendait chez Junayd et lui posait des questions, sans recevoir de réponse. Junayd lui disait : « Ô Abū Bakr, je crains pour toi et pour ta constance (*thabāt*). Ce trouble, cette inquiétude, cette acuité, cette étourderie, ces *shaṭḥ*-s, cela n'est pas le fait des (mystiques) confirmés et stables : cela relève des états spirituels des débutants, des novices (*ahl al-irādāt*) »[22]. Cependant, même dans la fragilité de ses états spirituels, Shiblī ne fut pas un disciple docile. A Junayd qui lui disait : « Si tu confiais ton destin à Dieu, tu serais apaisé », il répliqua : « Si Dieu te confiait ton destin, tu serais apaisé ! ». « Les épées de Shiblī dégouttent de sang », conclut Junayd[23].

Shiblī fréquenta Ḥallāj également, et il semble bien qu'ils furent très liés. Mais là, point à remarquer : il ne le suivit pas. Il marqua une distance « raisonnable », soulignons cet adjectif à propos d'un mystique réputé « ivre ». Les différents récits sur les rapports ultimes entre les deux hommes – au moment de l'exécution, en 309/922 – sont pluriels, contradictoires parfois, pas toujours fiables, ainsi que l'a noté Louis Massignon[24]. Mais tenons-nous malgré tout à cette hagiographie, instructive précisément du fait de ses contradictions. Au moment du procès, sommé de se prononcer sur le caractère hérétique de certains propos ḥallājiens, Shiblī répondit prudemment : « Si quelqu'un parle ainsi, il faut le lui interdire ». Par cette formule, il ne se prononçait pas sur le fond de la doctrine en cause, et suggérait sans doute qu'il fallait tout simplement s'abstenir de la

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[20] On serait tenté de dire un disciple (*shāgird*, selon Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt* 183), mais le terme de *ṣuḥba* était encore imprécis à l'époque, et son contenu peu institutionnalisé.

[21] *Lumaʿ* 486–491.

[22] *Lumaʿ* 488.

[23] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt* 343.

[24] Pour tout ce qui concerne les rapports entre Shiblī et Ḥallāj au moment de l'exécution, v. Massignon *Passion* i, 576, 649–650, 656–657, 659–666.

divulguer. Amené de force devant le gibet de Ḥallāj au moment de l'exécution, il aurait échangé avec lui des paroles sibyllines qui restèrent les *ultima verba* recueillies du condamné. Shiblī critiqua les propos de Ḥallāj dans plusieurs occasion publiques, mais affirma également, notamment devant des disciples : « Ḥallāj et moi n'avions qu'une seule et même doctrine. Mais il l'a publiée tandis que je la cachais. Ma folie m'a sauvé, tandis que sa lucidité l'a perdu ! »[25]. En effet, la révélation intérieure donnée au soufi peut paraître une énormité aux yeux du croyant ordinaire. Il a alors le choix entre plusieurs attitudes. Le mystique peut opter pour une réserve discrète et l'alignement doctrinal clair sur l'orthodoxie. Ce fut le choix de Junayd, qui recommandait à Shiblī de ne pas parler de ses expériences en public du fait de son état : « Malheur à toi (*ḥarām ʿalay-ka*), Abū Bakr, si tu parles à quiconque ! Car les hommes sont noyés (par leurs préoccupations) hors de Dieu, et toi, tu es noyé en Dieu »[26]. Un mystique peut également divulguer son vécu et tâcher de convaincre les autres croyants, comme le fit Ḥallāj. L'attitude de Shiblī suggère un troisième mode de comportement, celui de se situer à part, de côté, par l'excentricité, l'ivresse voire la folie. Cependant la justification ne va pas de soi : un extatique ne peut se désigner lui-même comme « fou » que grâce à une certaine dose de raison. Shiblī était un émotif, mais bien sûr pas un dément. Que recouvre donc son singulier aveu « ma folie m'a sauvé » ?

Afin d'éclairer cet aspect des paroles et comportements paradoxaux de Shiblī, abordons un aspect particulier de son enseignement : son rapport à la Loi. Car c'est en définitive cet aspect précis qui détermine si un mystique reste dans la norme – ou non, ainsi que le juge en a décidé dans le cas précis de Ḥallāj.

De façon générale, Shiblī dénonça comme trompeuse la science de *fuqahāʾ* qui, nous l'avons vu plus haut, ne pouvaient lui indiquer comment acquérir le *fiqh Allāh*. L'attitude générale qui unifiait ses pensées et ses paroles était : voir Dieu en toute chose. Ainsi interprète-t-il le verset coranique 24:30 « Dis aux croyants de baisser leurs regards pour préserver leur chasteté » comme « … baisser les regards devant les choses interdites, et les regards des cœurs devant tout ce qui n'est pas Dieu »[27]. Là est la clé, là est la norme fondamentale pour Shiblī, la distinction universelle entre bien et mal : savoir diriger sa conscience vers Dieu – ou non. Tous les

[25] *Ibid.* 127, 662 ; et Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt* 154.
[26] Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 371.
[27] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 127 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 153.

comportements, toutes les pensées s'ordonnent naturellement autour de cette aspiration, de cet état permanent de conscience. Ainsi les rituels de l'islam n'ont pour lui de sens que renvoyés à l'expérience intérieure qui les anime. Déjà l'énonciation de la *shahāda* lui était difficile. Comment prononcer en effet « non », *lā* avant *Allāh* ? Comment associer le nom d'une créature, fût-elle le prophète Muḥammad, à celui de Dieu ? N'en eût-il tenu qu'à lui seul, il aurait simplement répété « *Allāh* » sans plus[28]. Cette condensation extrême d'une pensée qu'aucune parole ordinaire n'arrive plus à contenir est d'ailleurs attestée par un bref dialogue qu'il aurait eu avec Junayd. « Que professes-tu (*aysh taqūl*) ? lui demanda celui-ci. « Je dis 'Dieu' ! » répliqua Shiblī. « Vas, que Dieu te protège ! » reprit Junayd[29]. Selon Sarrāj, Junayd avait évalué l'attitude mystique qui commandait une telle profession de foi, et faisait le vœu qu'elle n'entraîne pas Shiblī vers des conséquences dangereuses spirituellement parlant. Pourtant, la position de Shiblī est assez naturelle pour qui saisit expérimentalement l'incapacité du langage humain à atteindre quoique ce soit de ce Dieu auquel il s'adresse. Le langage, y compris la profession de foi, permet aux hommes de se parler entre eux de Dieu, en écartant p.ex. les conceptions polythéistes. Mais il ne peut guère dire Dieu Lui-même ; or l'aspiration mystique n'a de sens que par rapport à ce contact intime avec le divin.

La même attitude paradoxale se retrouve à propos du pèlerinage, cette fameuse question du *ḥajj* qui avait contribué à la sentence de mort contre Ḥallāj. Shiblī aurait déclaré : « Dans la Kaaba, il y a les traces de l'ami de Dieu (= Abraham) ; dans le cœur, il y a les traces de Dieu Lui-même. La maison a des angles et le cœur a les siens. Les angles de la Maison sont de pierre, ceux du cœur sont les mines de lumière de la connaissance divine »[30]. Dans un poème, il déclara :

> Si je ne fais pas de mon cœur sa maison et son séjour / je ne suis pas du groupe des vrais amants.
>
> Mon *ṭawāf* est qu'Il me laisse processionner en Lui / C'est Lui l'angle que je veux embrasser.[31]

De fait, la question est délicate, théologiquement parlant : il s'agit de la 'localisation' de Dieu. L'audace de maint mystique en islam affirmant la présence de Dieu en eux-mêmes les fit accuser de professer le *ḥulūl*.

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[28] Munāwī, *Kawākib* i, 560.
[29] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 488.
[30] Shaʿrānī *Ṭabaqāt* i, 105. Noter que Sulamī attribue la même parole à Ibn ʿAṭāʾ.
[31] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 443 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 503.

L'affirmation que la conscience du saint est le lieu 'spatial' de cette présence pouvait mener à l'accusation d'anomisme, *ibāḥa*, par la contestation de la nécessité du pèlerinage à La Mecque. Shiblī esquive ces accusations en feignant de ne voir en la Kaaba que le mémorial de la présence d'Abraham, et non de celle de Dieu : soit le souvenir d'un passage éloigné dans le temps, à la différence de la proximité au présent vécue dans le cœur du mystique. Dans le distique cité plus haut, après avoir déclaré que Dieu demeure en son cœur, il conclut en disant qu'il se décentre pour circumambuler autour de Dieu. Comme dépossédé de son propre centre, le mystique devient un pèlerin littéralement « hors de lui-même » processionnant autour de ce qui fut jadis son « moi ». Langage métaphorique, rhétorique amoureuse sans doute. Le résultat est là : Shiblī, mystique sincère et musulman sans arrière-pensée « hérétique », était beaucoup plus lucide, moins naïf qu'une certaine hagiographie s'est plu à le représenter.

Un parallélisme analogue peut être retrouvé à propos de la question de la *zakāt*. On raconte que le soufi Ibrāhīm ibn Shaybān al-Qirmisīnī, interdisait à ses disciples de rester en présence de Shiblī – sans doute du fait de sa réputation d'extatique outrancier. Ibn Shaybān voulut mettre Shiblī à l'épreuve, et lui demanda quel était le montant de la *zakāt* pour un propriétaire de cinq chameaux. « Un mouton selon l'obligation légale, répondit Shiblī – qui, rappelons-le, avait étudié le *fiqh* –, mais selon notre enseignement (*madhhabu-nā*), c'est tous (les cinq chameaux) ». « As-tu une autorité (*imām*) pour appuyer ton enseignement ? » reprit Ibn Shaybān. Shiblī donna à nouveau l'exemple d'Abū Bakr qui abandonna tous ses biens et ne laissa en héritage à ses enfants que « Dieu et son envoyé ». Dès lors, Ibn Shaybān n'interdit plus à ses disciples d'aller écouter Shiblī. L'anecdote vient montrer comment les deux attitudes face à la Loi sont également cohérentes et, d'une certaine manière, complémentaires[32]. La Loi propose une norme à l'ensemble des croyants : mais il ne peut exister aucune règle religieuse interdisant d'aller au-delà de la Loi pour montrer la dimension d'éternité des actes humains tendus vers Dieu.

Shiblī professait une approche très existentielle de la Loi. La Loi offre au musulman une voie de salut. Mais elle est en même temps une responsabilité immense, car ne pas répondre à son appel après l'avoir suivie implique une faute immense, en proportion. La magnificence du Paradis entraîne le châtiment de l'Enfer comme sa propre ombre. Or qui peut se prétendre parfait musulman ? C'est en ce sens que Shiblī affirme : « Si je

[32] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 210 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 252 ; et Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 261.

compare ma bassesse à celle des juifs et des chrétiens, elle serait encore plus vile que la leur »[33]. Car dans leur ignorance, juifs et chrétiens se trouvent en quelque sorte excusés. Alors que le musulman, et *a fortiori* le soufi qui fut gratifié des grâces de la proximité divine, se trouve sous le coup d'une accusation bien plus grave devant chacune de ses négligences, chacun de ses manquements. La « normativité » au niveau de l'élite spirituelle s'accompagne d'un péril de transgression que nul juge humain ne peut sonder. Mais l'inverse peut être vrai : si ce juge humain, exotérique, avait connaissance de la vérité intérieure vécue par Shiblī, il la condamnerait à l'aune de sa propre Loi extérieure. Ainsi affirma-t-il : « Si quelqu'un comprenait ce que je disais, je ceindrais des *zunnār*-s ! »[34]. Car le juge estimerait que Shiblī proclame sa divinité personnelle – comme d'autres ont pu le faire à propos de ʿUzayr ou de Jésus – au lieu de saisir son annonce de la pure et universelle présence de Dieu en tout lieu.

Il ne faut pas se méprendre sur la posture de Shiblī par rapport à la Loi. Celle-ci garde chez lui le rôle de médiation irremplaçable entre les hommes et Dieu. Elle est une invitation permanente à rejoindre la présence divine. A la question que lui aurait fait poser le vizir ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā à l'hôpital : « Tu nous as dit quand tu étais en bonne santé que tout saint (*ṣiddīq*) qui ne produit pas un miracle (*muʿjiza*) est un imposteur ; quel est ton miracle ? », il répondit que même lors de ses moments d'ivresse (*sukr*), il restait en accord avec Dieu (*muwāfaqat Allāh*)[35]. On ne peut affirmer de façon plus éloquente que même son ivresse, voire sa folie, restaient sous le contrôle de Celui qui avait établi la Loi comme les destins humains, décrétant que la Loi devienne un chemin vers sa Miséricorde. A la différence des soufis anomistes ou des Carmates, l'obéissance à la Loi est pour Shiblī une évidence et un impératif catégorique : « L'être le plus étonnant, c'est quelqu'un qui connaît Dieu et qui lui désobéit », aurait-il affirmé[36]. La Loi permet donc au fidèle d'atteindre un certain niveau de perfection, de complétude, de conformation à Dieu. La fidélité scrupuleuse de Shiblī à la Loi est illustrée au moment de son agonie, lorsqu'il perdit l'usage de la

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[33] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 478, Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 240–241. Sarrāj met en regard ce *shaṭḥ* avec un autre où Shiblī proclame son statut seigneurial en disant à des hôtes qui le quittaient : « Allez, je suis avec vous où que vous soyez ! ». Les deux, dit-il, sont valides. Tantôt Shiblī se trouve en état de *wajd*, habité par la divine présence ; tantôt il proclame son état de faiblesse d'homme pécheur. Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 535 ; et Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 384 ; Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 238–240.

[34] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 479 ; Gramlich, 536.

[35] Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 367.

[36] Munāwī, *Kawākib* i, 555.

parole, et fit comprendre par geste au disciple qui accompagnait ses derniers instants qu'il devait également lui peigner la barbe[37]. Quelques instants avant de quitter le monde matériel, il se souvenait encore du rituel du *takhlīl* prescrit, comme si la Loi avait fini par l'habiter de l'intérieur au point d'imprégner sa sub-conscience. La constatation de cette assimilation de la Loi permet de mieux évaluer une des plus importants traits de la spiritualité de Shiblī, sa « folie en Dieu ».

Une des caractéristiques de la posture spirituelle de Shiblī est, nous l'avons vu, la folie innocente – innocente à l'égard de la Loi, certes, mais également par sincérité à l'égard de Dieu. Que penser de cet aspect excentrique, voire fou, que l'on a attribué à Shiblī et qui contribua tant à sa notoriété ? On rapporte de lui des actions sans doute porteuses d'un sens symbolique, à but d'enseignement : comme les fumigations d'ambre qu'il fit sous la queue d'un âne[38]. Sans doute sa propre 'folie' correspondait-elle à un type spirituel : on retrouve d'ailleurs des récits analogues rapportés à propos d'autres grandes figures spirituelles de l'époque comme Nūrī ou Sumnūn. Il dit ainsi à son principal disciple, Ḥuṣrī : « Tu es un fou comme moi, il existe entre toi et moi une affinité préétternelle ! »[39]. Nous rejoignons ici l'idée de « saint fou » ou de « fou sage », connu dans l'hagiographie musulmane[40].

Son comportement devait cependant être suffisamment excentrique – et surtout dangereux physiquement ou moralement – pour qu'on l'enfermât à plusieurs reprises dans le *māristān* des fous. Certaines de ses actions confirment à vrai dire cette folie, comme l'accueil qu'il fit à des amis venus le visiter à l'hôpital psychiatrique. « Qui êtes-vous ? » demanda l'interné. « Des gens qui t'aiment » répondirent-ils. Il se mit alors à jeter des tuiles sur eux et, comme ils s'enfuyaient, il criait : « Menteurs, vous prétendez m'aimer, et vous n'avez pas de patience quand je vous frappe ! »[41]. Mais simultanément, son attitude continuait à véhiculer une réelle sagesse. Shiblī lui-même était conscient de son état et s'en plaignait avec humilité

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[37] Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 371.

[38] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 483 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 540 ; Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 258–259.

[39] « *Anta dīwāna mithlī, baynī wa-bayna-ka taʾlīf azalī* », rapporté par Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt* 236–237.

[40] Une bibliographie substantielle existe sur cet aspect de la folie en terre d'Islam. Voir, par example, Dols, *Majnūn* 374–422.

[41] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 77, Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 97 ; Hujwirī, *Kashf* 404. On peut supposer que ses actions 'ivres' visaient à un but pédagogique ; ainsi lorsqu'il jeta à l'eau un Soufi qui poussait inopinément des cris dans son *majlis*, en disant : « S'il est sincère, il sortira comme Moïse et s'il est menteur, il coulera comme Pharaon ! » Cité par Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 273–274 ; Shaʿrānī *Ṭabaqāt* i, 105.

devant ses visiteurs : « Des gens sains viennent voir un malade. Quel profit trouvez-vous en moi ? On m'a fait rentrer tant et tant de fois à l'hôpital, on m'y a fait boire tant et tant de médicaments, et cela n'a fait qu'augmenter ma folie ! »[42] – mais sans doute visait-il dans cette dernière phrase autre chose que la maladie psychique. L'équivoque demeure, comme dans la réplique qu'il fit à des gens du souk qui le traitaient de fou : « Pour vous je suis fou et pour moi vous êtes sains ; puisse Dieu augmenter ma folie et augmenter votre santé ! ». Pour Hujwirī qui relate l'anecdote[43], cette réplique a valeur d'invective : Shiblī s'étonnait qu'on puisse ne pas distinguer la folie de l'amour, cet enthousiasme nécessairement irrépressible qu'induit la proximité divine. La « santé » des croyants ordinaires traduit en fait la dureté insensée de leurs cœurs. Comme le notait Dols : « For ash-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj, it was a matter of orthodox madness versus unorthodox madness »[44].

Avec cette manière si émotive et extravertie de vivre la mystique, nous nous trouvons au centre de la psychologie de Shiblī, de ce qui la rend à la fois si attachante et si inquiétante. En psychologie contemporaine, la psychose correspond à une confusion constante du sujet entre son monde intérieur et le monde extérieur. Pour Shiblī, la présence divine se manifestait effectivement partout dans le monde, et il s'étonnait que ce ne fût pas plus évident pour tous. Les *shaṭaḥāt* de Shiblī nous conduisent à ce qui a dû constituer le cœur de son expérience intérieure. Le mystique fait l'expérience de la présence de Dieu ; mais ce Dieu est Tout, et l'homme, lui, n'est rien. Il s'agit d'une situation totalement instable : quel rapport, en fait, peut s'établir entre la Conscience universelle, éternelle, et l'éphémère et fragile « moi » prononcé par le mystique ? entre l'Être devant le miroir, et son éphémère reflet ? Ce dernier obéit sans cesse aux mouvements de l'être devant le miroir. Quelqu'un demanda un jour à Shiblī : « Pourquoi te vois-je toujours inquiet (*qaliq*) ? Dieu n'est-Il pas avec toi, et toi avec Lui ? » Il répondit : « Si j'étais avec Lui, je Le manquerais. Mais je suis effacé en Lui ! »[45]. En d'autres termes : cette agitation n'est pas la mienne, elle manifeste un flux, une énergie imprévisible qui dépend d'une

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[42] Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 368.

[43] *Kashf* 237 ; Mortazavi, *Somme spirituelle* 188.

[44] *Majnūn* 385.

[45] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 432 : « *wa-lākinnī maḥwun fī-mā Huwa* » ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 493. A qui lui demandait comment la « réalisation » (*taḥaqquq*) du mystique avait lieu, il répondit : « Comment réaliser Ce qui n'est pas fixe ? Comment se reposer sur Ce qui n'est pas apparent ? Comment être en familiarité avec Ce qui est caché ? Car Il est l'Apparent et le Caché, le Caché et l'Apparent ! ». Cité par Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt* 347.

Réalité transcendante que je ne maîtrise nullement – et, si ma conscience le maîtrisait, je ne Lui serais plus présent. Shiblī enseignait que ce bas monde comme l'au-delà est un rêve, et que le réveil se trouve en Dieu[46] ; sa folie venant sans doute qu'il ne partageait pas les mêmes rêves que ses contemporains. Il en était conscient. « Combien les hommes ont besoin d'ivresse », disait-il, « d'une ivresse qui les dispense de s'occuper de leur ego, de leurs actions, de leurs états ! ». Et il ajouta un vers :

> Tu me crois vivant, alors que je suis mort / une partie de moi, exilée, pleure sur l'autre partie[47].

Remarquons enfin, pour clore cet aspect de 'folie' chez Shiblī, qu'il a été considéré par ses contemporains comme un grand maître spirituel. On peut donc penser que ces excentricités avaient souvent un but de pédagogie spirituelle[48]. Son *majlis* était très fréquenté. Même s'il n'eut comme disciple à strictement parler que Ḥuṣrī – du moins selon Jāmī[49] – il connut un grand nombre des soufis de son époque et son influence fut considérable[50]. Plusieurs grands mystiques des générations ultérieures se sont réclamés de ses enseignements et parfois le font figurer dans leurs *silsila*-s. C'est l'hommage le plus solide à sa cohérence spirituelle et humaine.

Concluons. Le *shaṭḥ* n'est pas un langage « aux normes », certes, mais d'autre part il ne laisse pas vraiment de prise à la condamnation[51]. Qu'il soit prononcé au moment même de l'extase ou en-dehors, ce n'est plus le sujet humain « Shiblī » à proprement parler qui est en jeu. Mais qui est en jeu alors, et quel est son enjeu ? Certes, aucun musulman n'est tenu de croire que c'est une authentique inspiration divine qui s'exprime dans les propos de Shiblī. D'ailleurs son *shaṭḥ* n'est pas un argument cherchant à convaincre. Cependant, il reste un langage, alors que l'extase, le *wajd*,

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[46] C'est une interprétation possible d'une parole elliptique rapportée par Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 372, où Shiblī interprète les versets coraniques 75:7–12 « Lorsque la vue sera éblouie / et que la lune s'éclipsera / et que le soleil et la lune seront réunis / l'homme se dira ce jour-là « Où fuir ? » / Non ! Point de refuge ! / Vers ton Seigneur sera ce jour-là le retour », en disant : « Lorsque le bas monde et l'au-delà deviendront un rêve, et que Dieu sera le réveil ».

[47] Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, 372 ; Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt* 345.

[48] Ce que suppose Sobieroj, al-Shiblī.

[49] *Nafaḥāt* 236.

[50] Massignon, *Passion* i, 125–126 ; Sobieroj, al-Shiblī, et *Ibn Ḫafīf* 62–64, 143–144, 153–154.

[51] Ainsi Sarrāj déclare-t-il : « Ces paroles que l'on rapporte de Shiblī sont un discours global (*kalām mujmal*) qui part de principes implicites. Si un homme raisonnable comprend ces principes, il ne s'offusquera pas de la parole de Shiblī » (*Lumaʿ* 481 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 538).

aurait pu produire le silence du ravissement. Il est proféré en public, il s'adresse malgré tout à des hommes dans un but précis. Il est témoignage. Quel que soit son vécu intérieur, l'homme qui a prononcé ces phrases est allé au-delà de la norme des théologiens, des philosophes et des linguistes : pour lui, la parole du croyant mystique manque son but tant que le sujet du discours n'y associe pas son « objet ». Si le croyant dit « Dieu » ou « au nom de Dieu (*bismillāh*) » sans que le Dieu objet de son discours ne soit pas aussi de quelque manière son sujet – car c'est Lui qui accorde la grâce de la foi – il pose un concept purement humain, une idée « idole » et s'éloigne par là même du divin dont sa parole devrait le rapprocher. Shiblī exposait cette idée centrale dans un style qui rappelle Ḥallāj : « Contempler Dieu est mécréance, penser à Lui est associationnisme, faire allusion à Lui est un piège (*makr*) »[52]. L'incapacité du langage humain amenèrent Shiblī à distinguer plusieurs niveaux de discours : « Il existe trois langues (*lisān*) : celle de la science (*ʿilm*), celle de la Réalité (*ḥaqīqa*), et celle du Vrai absolu (*Ḥaqq*). La langue de la science est celle qui nous parvient par des intermédiaires ; celle de la Réalité est envoyée par Dieu dans l'intime des cœurs sans intermédiaires ; celles du Vrai, nul n'a accès à elle (*laysa la-hu ṭarīq*) »[53]. Certainement Shiblī entendait parler dans la seconde langue, depuis la Réalité. Pour celui qui comprend le lieu où il voulait se situer, son *shaṭḥ* n'est plus si paradoxal. Et il se trouve même aligné sur la foi du croyant ordinaire, pour qui – si l'on suit la position ashʿarite – les actes et les pensées sont en fait créés par Dieu, puis acquis par l'homme. Cette théologie, Shiblī ne se contente pas d'y croire : il la vit, et c'est ce que son *shaṭḥ* tend à exprimer. L'on s'aperçoit alors que ce qui fait l'excès du *shaṭḥ* c'est bien plus l'écoute étonnée ou scandalisée de l'auditeur que la doctrine du mystique à proprement parler.

Dès lors qui pourrait condamner Shiblī ? Quel tribunal pourrait-il se prononcer contre lui à cause des paroles qu'il a prononcées ? Qualifier la parole de Shiblī de mécréance, n'est-ce pas prendre parti de façon bien téméraire, se mettre à la place du seul Juge en droit de statuer – et du coup sombrer dans l'excès blasphématoire dénoncé, précisément, à l'encontre du *shaṭṭāḥ* accusé ?

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[52] Rūzbihān, *Shaṭḥiyyāt* 267–268 ; Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilya* x, p.368.

[53] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ* 287 ; Gramlich, *Schlaglichter* 333. Et variante dans *Lumaʿ* 430 ; *Schlaglichter*, 492.

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RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY & APOCALYPSE: *TAFSĪR* AS EXPERIENCE IN AN EARLY WORK BY THE BĀB*

Todd Lawson

It is of some significance that the first major work by ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (d. 1850), known to history as *The Bāb*, founder of the influential yet short-lived Iranian Bābī religion, is a commentary on the first two chapters of the Qurʾān—the short *al-Fātiḥa* (the Opening) and the longest sura of the Qurʾān, *al-Baqara* (the Cow). It is, however, known as the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*. The sura *al-Baqara* is sometimes regarded by exegetes as "the Qurʾān in miniature" because in it are found most of the same concerns, ordinances, conceits and images found throughout the Book. A commentary on this sura by any given author would therefore tend to reveal the way he would approach the entire Qurʾān. It may be also that the Bāb had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qurʾān at the time he wrote this commentary in early 1259–60/1844. After all, he is said to have later produced no less than nine complete *tafāsīr* during his incarceration in Azerbaijan during the last months of his life. Why he would have suspended such a project at this earlier date is open to speculation. We do know, however, that it was shortly after the completion of this commentary on the first part (*juzʾ*) of the Qurʾān that Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūʾī made his visit to Shīrāz, and the Bābī "movement" may be said to have been born. It was during this visit that the Bāb laid claim to a new revelation, an apocalyptic event very much in line with the expectations of Twelver Shīʿism inasmuch as it was now a thousand years since the last or 12th Imām had gone into occultation. The medium for this apocalypse was an unusual commentary on the sura of Joseph (*Yūsuf*)—the 12th sura of the Qurʾān that was in fact written in the form of a Qurʾān: divided into suras and ayas with disconnected letters appearing at the beginning of the suras. The message to the Shīʿa was: this is the true Qurʾān that had been in hiding with the 12th Imām until now and

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its appearance also entails the appearance or return of the hidden Imām. This second much more famous work, the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, also known as the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* or the *Aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*, appears to be the first work written after the commentary on *al-Baqara*. Its contents—which include in the course of things, a kind of commentary on most of the Qur'ān—suggest that the Bāb's desire to comment on the entire Qur'ān might have been expressed in it and it therefore became unnecessary to compose an actual commentary in the more traditional style of the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*.[1] Further, such dramatic events as unfolded in the wake of the new apocalypse possibly had the effect of diverting the Bāb's attention from such a very traditional, purely literary project to concentrate upon newer and more important developments.

Whatever the case may be, the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*—with which we are solely concerned in what follows—provides invaluable information about the nature of the Bāb's earliest religious ideas. There has been a tendency to regard the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* as the first work of any significance written by the Bāb.[2] Beginning with the invaluable research of Denis MacEoin on the sources for Bābī doctrine and history, it has become progressively more clear that the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the Bābī religion.[3] Insofar as this first major work was also a *tafsīr*, its interest goes beyond the confines of a study of a specific "heresy" to engage with the greater Islamic tradition itself on the common ground of the Qur'ān.[4] Of the several topics and themes discussed in the Bāb's commentary on *al-Baqara*, four emerge as the most characteristic: divine self-manifestation—*tajallī*; the hierarchization of being and existence; eschatology—*khurūj, qiyāma,*

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[1] See Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse* 21–45 for a fuller description of this later work.

[2] Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 172–73.

[3] Furthermore, because it was written during the earliest period of the Bāb's literary activity, MacEoin thinks that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Bahā'ī/Azalī dispute. MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 41.

[4] Several manuscripts of the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* are known to exist. The interested reader is referred to MacEoin's book for details where 15 are listed with, in some cases, the name of the scribe and the date of transcription. MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 201; see also his comments on the work, 33, 37, 46–7 and 74. One should add to MacEoin's list the Leiden manuscript that was mistakenly thought to contain only a commentary on a few verses, MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine* 33: "verses 70–94 only". and a manuscript of the work, as yet uncatalogued, in the Princeton "Bābī Collection". This last item bears a provisional shelf number 268 and is dated 1328 [1910]. It is bound in one volume with another manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-jazā' min nuqṭat al-bā'*.

ẓuhūr; and "religious" authority—*walāya.* Here, we are concerned only with this fourth topic.[5]

Walāya

The heart of all Shīʿism centers on the strong veneration of the first Imām, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) as the guardian, protector, and true friend of those who have acknowledged his station as the immediate successor of the Prophet Muḥammad. For this reason he is known as *walī*, and the quality of his authority is called *walāya.* Indeed, as indicated in an earlier study of the Bāb's work, *walāya* may also be understood as a synonym for covenant itself.[6] There is in Shīʿism no notion more fundamental than this. The study of this commentary by the Bāb must begin, therefore, with an examination of the way in which the subject of *walāya* is treated. It will be seen, perhaps not surprisingly, that the idea was just as central to the Bāb's thought, as it is to Shīʿism in general. Also, it will be seen that belief or faith (*īmān*) is conditioned by the degree to which one accepts the *walāya* of ʿAlī, and after him the Imāms, to the extent that a deed, no matter how meritorious, is unacceptable unless it has been performed by one who has fully confessed the truth of this *walāya*. Moreover, this *walāya* has existed from eternity, much like the so-called "Muḥammadan light," and numbers among those who have recognized it the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As an eternal principle, it remains an imperative for all would-be believers at all times; through acceptance or rejection of this spiritual authority, one determines the fate of one's soul.[7]

The radical interpretation of several passages in the *Sūrat al-baqara* as speaking directly to the subject of *walāya* is not an innovation of the Bāb's, but has characterized a strong tendency in Shīʿī exegesis from the earliest times. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the *'ulamā'* class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a need

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[5] Lawson, Qur'ān, part II.

[6] Lawson, Dangers 189–191; see now the very interesting discussion in Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran* 121–125.

[7] See Landolt, Walāyah and now the excellent study by Dakake, *The Charismatic Community.* See also the appropriate passages in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (q.v. index *walāya, walī, awliyā*) and his article Notes à propos de la *Walāya* Imamite, recently translated as Notes on Imāmī-Shīʿī *Walāya*. A recent book on the topic of *walāya* in the early Ṣūfī/Sunnī milieu is also important: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism.*

to reassert or "revalorize" this cardinal Shīʿī doctrine in an unaccustomed "location." Why such a need was felt at this particular time and within the Iranian merchant class, has been discussed at length by scholars concerned with the social history of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Iran and we may conclude that it has something to do with the conceptual contiguity of the two categories, religious authority (*walāya*) and apocalypse (*ẓuhūr, kashf*) a contiguity which was mirrored by the temporal contiguity of the date of the Shīʿī eschaton and the literary activity of the Bāb. The following description will illustrate the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture.

Absolute Walāya

The subject of *walāya* is introduced very early in the *tafsīr* where reference is made to the Absolute Walāya (*walāyatuhu al-muṭlaqa*) of ʿAlī, although the statement is not free of ambiguity. It comes in the course of the Bāb's commentary on the second verse of the *Fātiḥa*: Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds. The verse is said to be the book (*kitāb*) of ʿAlī, in which God has placed all the principles (*aḥkām*) of Absolute Walāya pertaining to it. It is called here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (*jannat al-wāḥidiyya*), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm ʿAlī's *walāya*.[8]

In this very brief statement certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the *tafsīr*. Apart from the

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[8] *Baqara* 8 and I 156: *qad jaʿalahā Allāhu ẓillahā li-man aqarra bi-walāyatihi*; cf. 2b: *qad jaʿala Allāhu* . . . Repeated reference throughout this commentary to the ideas of *aḥadiyya, wāḥidiyya, raḥmāniyya*, and so on, constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and its use here by the Bāb offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history's greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shīʿī spiritual discourse (*ʿirfān*) by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn ʿArabī's student Qunāwī and others, see Chittick, The Five Divine Presences. (See also the important critique of this article by Landolt.) Briefly, the term *aḥadiyya* represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which man can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb), but does not, of course, define the Absolute which must always be beyond whatever occurs about It in the mind of man. The term *wāḥidiyya* refers to the next highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect which involves the "appearance" of the divine names and attributes. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya* 25 and 47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries. One form of the argument is analyzed in Landolt, Der Briefweschel esp. 41–63.

word *walāya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wāḥidiyya* recurs over and over again throughout the work. It appears to be descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity that constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (*aḥadiyya*). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called *waḥdat al-wujūd* school associated with Ibn ʿArabī. Suffice it here to say that the Absolute Walāya represents a theoretical position, at least one remove from the Ultimate.[9]

The choice of the word "principles" (*aḥkām*) has several connotations. In his short introductory sentence to the *tafsīr* on the *Fātiḥa*, the Bāb characterizes this opening chapter of the Qurʾān as containing seven clear verses (*ayāt muḥkamāt*). The hermeneutic polarities of *mutashābihāt*/*muḥkamāt* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsīr* in general, and have been the cause of much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The primary idea is that the Qurʾān contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level these are thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the Book. The terminology here is taken from Q 3:7:

> It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear [*muḥkamāt*] that are the Essence of the Book [*umm al-kitāb*], and others ambiguous [*mutashābihāt*]. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation [*taʾwīlihi*]; and none knows its interpretation [*taʾwīl*], save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.[10]

With this verse comes one of the more fundamental disagreements between the Sunnī and Shīʿī exegetes who differ as to the sentence structure of this verse. The above translation represents the "Sunnī" reading. A Shīʿī reading would be: and none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fi-l-ʾilm*). These *rāsikhūn* are of course the Imāms, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Uṣūlīs, the mujtahids.[11] So understood, the

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[9] See Lawson, The Structure of Existence.

[10] This and all subsequent Qurʾān quotations are from the Arberry translation, though the verse numbering is that of the standard Egyptian edition.

[11] A good summary of the general Sunnī/Shīʿī debate on this topic may be found in B. Shah, The Imām as Interpreter of the Qurʾān 71 n. 14. On the question of *muḥkamāt*/*mutashābihāt*, see for example MacAuliffe, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Approach. The author concentrates on al-Rāzī's interpretation of this very verse, which becomes something of a

designation of the verses of the *Fātiḥa* as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bāb read them as having a positive and binding relationship with a true understanding of the Book. Seen in this light, his statement that verse 2 ordains belief in the Absolute Walāya of ʿAlī must be taken as divine law, binding upon the believer in the same way as legal prescriptions for the terms of inheritance, or even prayer and fasting, are obligatory.[12]

At verse 3 of *Sūrat al-baqara*, the subject of Absolute Walāya is once again encountered. Here the Qurʾānic statement THOSE WHO PERFORM THE PRAYER is said by the Bāb to imply general obedience (*al-idhʿān*) to Muḥammad and his Trustees (*awṣiyāʾ*) and his daughter (*bintihi*) through the Most Great Absolute Walāya (*al-walāyat al-muṭlaqa al-kubrā*).[13] While in the previous statement this Absolute Walāya was linked with ʿAlī alone, here it includes all of the Imāms. In the same section *walāya* is identified with *tawḥīd*, the affirmation of the divine unity. The Bāb says that the act of prayer "from beginning to end" is the "form of affirming divine uniqueness" (*sūrat al-tafrīd*), the "temple (*haykal*) of *tawḥīd*," and the "shadow (*shabaḥ*) of *walāya*."[14] This being the case, only the actual bearers[15] of *walāya* are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost (*awwal*) station of distinction between Beloved (*maḥbūb*, i.e., God) and the lover (*ḥabīb*, in this case Muḥammad and the Imāms). The Family of God (*āl Allāh* = Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the 12 Imāms) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created [hu]mankind in order to be known." This love (*maḥabba*) was manifested (*tajallā*) by God to them by means of their own selves (*la-hum bi-him*), to such a

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statement of method in which various points of view are mentioned. For a discussion of the issue within a tradition more akin to the one in which the Bāb wrote, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mutashābihāt al-Qurʾān*.

[12] Al-Ṣādiq is said to have glossed *al-muḥkamāt hunna umm al-kitāb* as "the Commander of the Faithful and the Imāms" and *al-mutashābihāt* as "*fulān wa fulān*," e.g., Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. See al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār* 132.

[13] *Baqara* 25. This ms. and others have *nabtihi* which may be an error. The passage needs to be checked against all available mss. before a critical edition may be prepared.

[14] On *shabaḥ* (pl. *ashbāḥ*), often encountered with a companion word *ẓill* (pl. *aẓilla*) see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* 32, 33 and 40 where the translation of *ashbāḥ nūr* is given as "silhouettes of light". These "silhouettes of light" represent the "ontological modalities of the Imams themselves during the "time" of pre-existence.

[15] *Maẓāhir* (sing. *maẓhar*) lit: "the place where *walāya* appears or is manifest". It may be translated directly as manifestations as long as it is remembered that the manifestations themselves are not the agents or manifestors, but the vehicles by means of which the manifestation takes place as a result of God's manifesting activity.

degree of exclusivity that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.[16]

The Bāb continues to say that the Family of God (*āl Allāh*) are the loci (*maḥāll*) of all servitude and all lordship (*ʿubūdiyyāt* and *rubūbiyyāt*), implying that it is through their act of servitude that they have been invested with the rank of lordship in relation to others. Whoever, then, confesses the truth of their *walāya* in the "area of servitude" (*ṣuqʿ al-ʿubūdiyya*), has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One. And he who performs the prayer and "lifts the 'veils of glory' and enters the glorious house (*bayt al-jalāl*), such a one will dwell under the protection, relief and comfort (*ẓill*) of their *walāya*."[17]

At Q 2:24, one of the *taḥaddī* or "challenge" verses, Absolute Walāya is explained negatively, as not being acknowledged by those who were challenged to bring a sura comparable to those in the Qurʾān.[18] In short, those guilty of *kufr* (disbelief), are all those who have failed to recognize the Absolute Walāya of ʿAlī. Inasmuch as these unbelievers are said to be those who have been given the love of Abū Bakr (*maḥabbat al-awwal*) that is in fact a FIRE,[19] it seems here that "absolute" refers not first of all to any philosophical or metaphysical absoluteness, but rather to exclusivity. That is, true *walāya* cannot be shared during a given period of time. In this connection, it may be added that there appears to be no difference in the quality of the *walāya* born by any of the Imāms. At verse 60 of *Sūrat al-baqara*, for example, the WATER which GUSHED FORTH from the ROCK at TWELVE different places after Moses STRUCK it with his STAFF, is said to represent the *walāya* of all the Imāms. The Bāb says that although the WATER issued from these various places, it was in fact the same WATER.

Walāya of God

A cognate notion of Absolute Walāya is the Walāya of God, *walāyat al-ḥaqq*. It is first encountered at Q 2:34, which is one of the longer commentaries on an individual verse in the *tafsīr*. Explaining the command

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[16] *Baqara* 25.

[17] *Baqara* 26: *kashf subuḥāt al-jalāl.* This term comes from the famous tradition of Kumayl, a commentary on which is ascribed to the Bāb.

[18] *Baqara* 75. Other *taḥaddī* verses are Q 10:39, 11:16, 17:90, and 28:49.

[19] On such epithets as "The First" as a reference to Abū Bakr in Ismāʿīlī literature, see Strothmann, *Korankommentar*, Introduction 20. See now, also, Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification* 359, 283*, 474*, 522, 616*, 617, 621, 660, 672*, 684, and 698.

of God to the angels: Bow yourselves to Adam!, the Bāb says that the esoteric interpretation (*tafsīr al-bāṭin*) understands the speaker of the command to be not God but Muḥammad, while the angels are the seeds of all created things (*dharr al-ashyā' fī mashhad al-ūlā*), a reference to the Qur'ānic Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mīthāq*) mentioned at Q 7:172:[20]

> when thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins—their descendants *[dhurriyatahum]*, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes you and sustains you)?"—They said: "Yea verily! We do testify!" (This), lest ye should say on the day of judgement: "Of this we were never aware."

The act of prostration is the confession of servitude to the *walāya* of God, which is equated with allegiance to ʿAlī, and the disavowal of all else.

Adam, furthermore, is none other than ʿAlī, and Iblīs is none other than Abū Bakr. At this level the *walāya* is also characterized as the *walāya* of the Exclusive Unity belonging to ʿAlī (*walāyat al-aḥadiyya li-ʿAlī*). The entire drama, it should be emphasized, occurs before "creation." Thus Abū Bakr (almost always referred to as Abū al-Dawāhī "Father of Iniquities") is the symbol of primordial infidelity and ignorance—*kufr*, just as ʿAlī is the symbol of primordial faith and knowledge—*īmān*. The angels, as mentioned above, are taken as the seeds or potential of all created things destined to develop into actuality. They are also referred to as pre-existent forms (*ashbāḥ*) and shadows (*aẓilla*).

The primordial drama had its historical re-enactment or analogue on the day of al-Ghadīr, 18 Dhu-l-Ḥijja 10/16 March 632 when Muḥammad appointed ʿAlī as his successor. At that time the angels were Salmān, al-Jundab and Miqdād, the early stalwart supporters of ʿAlī.[21] It is important to note however, that here we use the word "re-enactment" rather inappropriately. It is obvious that for the author of this commentary it is the event of al-Ghadīr which gives meaning to the primordial drama described in Q 7:172, so from this point of view it is actually prior in spiritual value. Al-Ghadīr will shortly be re-enacted in the revelation of the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*. This would seem to be a perfect, if rather distinctive, instance of

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[20] *Baqara* 131. The term *mashhad al-ūlā* is determined by the fact that *al-ūlā* ("pre-existence") is one of three technical terms, which refer to separate historico-spiritual cycles. The other two are *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira*. These words occur in a verse of a visitation prayer for the Imāms and are commented upon at length by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī in *Ziyāra* 68–70, in the course of which commentary their technical meaning is made clear.

[21] *Baqara* 131. See Veccia Vaglieri, Ghadīr Khumm.

apocalyptic reversal. Here it is the events of metahistory which trump the events of linear or temporal history, though the events of al-Ghadīr came later than the Day of the Covenant, the true value and identity of this day rests in what appears to be the chronologically later event in which ʿAlī was appointed the center of Muḥammad's covenant.

In the commentary on Q 2:62, the term Absolute Walāya is associated with the entire Family of God, because they are sanctified servants who do nothing of their own wills, but rather the will of God.

> Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their reward awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.

The works of righteousness mentioned in this verse therefore are described as being all included in the act of recognizing (*iʿtirāf*) their Absolute Walāya, and their reward awaits them with ʿAlī. In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that even non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing ʿAlī. This may offer a further indication of the way in which "absolute" (*muṭlaqa*) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Q 10:62, where it is specifically the friends of God (*awliyāʾ Allāh*) who will neither grieve nor sorrow.[22] Such cross-references and correspondences are quite likely not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates by its vocabulary (*awliyāʾ* plural of *walī*) the theme of *walāya*.

At verse 83, the term Universal Walāya occurs:

> And when We took compact with the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy; and speak good to men, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms.' then you turned away, all but a few of you, swerving aside.

The Bāb says that God is speaking here about His taking compact with all created things "in the eight paradises," to recognize the *walāya* of ʿAlī.[23] The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (*lujjat al-waḥda*), and is characterized by the command: You shall not serve any save God

[22] *Baqara* 195–6.
[23] *Baqara* 223.

"[and this] without reference [to anything else]."[24] In the second paradise the COMPACT was taken by means of recognizing the Universal Walāya (*al-walāyat al-kulliyya*) of the PARENTS, i.e., Muḥammad and ʿAlī who are respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bāb says, is in reality the GOOD mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merits. The GOOD which these particular PARENTS deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bāb to openly (*bi-l-taṣrīḥ*) describe it, the prattling enemies (*mubṭilūn*) would cavil at it.[25]

Throughout the *tafsīr* there are numerous statements indicating that Absolute Walāya is in fact the same as *walāya* per se. The following presents the various aspects of this all-important notion and includes material related to the ideas of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), Messengership (*risāla*), Trusteeship (*waṣiyya*) and Leadership (*imāma*).

False Walāya

The idea that *walāya* can be either true or false may be traced to the Qur'ān itself. In such verses as Q 8:73, for example, reference is made to the UNBELIEVERS who are FRIENDS (*awliyāʾ*) OF ONE ANOTHER, or Q 62:6 where the Jews are criticized for their claim to be the FRIENDS OF GOD, APART FROM OTHER MEN. The two opposing groups, *ḥizb Allāh* and *ḥizb al-Shayṭān* mentioned respectively in Q 5:56 and 58:19, represent a basic division which provides at least theoretical support for the ideas presented in this *tafsīr*. This distinction between two fundamentally opposed groups is most evident in Medinese suras and has been seen to be related to the

[24] *Bi-lā ishāra*, an allusion to the *Ḥadīth Kumayl*. The distinctive term *lujja* deserves some attention. As *hapax legomenon* (Q 27:44) it raises questions of meaning, even though it occurs here along with the important marker of apocalypse *kashf*. Avicenna's use of it in the last book of the *Ishārāt* (viz. *lujjat al-wuṣūl*: "depth or sea of re-union") further domesticates the mysterious and poetic Qur'ānic usage for the gnostic and mystical lexicon of Islam (Ibn Sina, *Kitāb al-ishārat wa-l-tanbihāt*, vol. 4, *namaṭ* 9, *bāb* 20, 98–9; see also the recent excellent translation of this important book of the *Ishārāt* by Keven Brown, listed below in the bibliography). It is one of several "hydrological" images used frequently in this work, others are *yamm, ṭamṭām, taṭanjayn* in addition to the words denoting bodies of water found in *Sūrat al-baqara* or elsewhere in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. For a study of the poetic and gnoseological role of water in the Qur'ān, see Lawson, Divine Wrath and Mercy.

[25] *Baqara* 224.

different concerns that faced the Prophet after his departure from Mecca, where *walāya* was purely God-oriented.[26]

The figure of ʿAlī is presented as the bearer, par excellence, of this True Walāya, although it has already been emphasized that the quality of this *walāya* is not changed, regardless of who its (rightful) bearer might be. As we have seen, True Walāya, or the Walāya of God (*walāyat al-ḥaqq*), had its beginning in pre-eternity, or pre-existence when the sub-atomic existential potential identities or *dharr*, of all things were commanded to acknowledge the authority of ʿAlī. It was also at this time that its opposite, the Walāya of the False One (*walāyat al-bāṭil*) and Falsehood acquired potential existence. Just as ʿAlī is the bearer of True Walāya, Abū Bakr is designated as the bearer of False Walāya.

Such a statement is of course indicative of the milieu in which the Bāb was writing. It is remarkable that this kind of denigration of important Sunnī personalities is absent from the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, written shortly after this commentary. The theme is an old and definitive one in Shīʿī literature, and should be viewed as a standard element of religious vocabulary, and one which lends concrete and immediate meaning to various passages in the Qurʾān read in this Shīʿī milieu. Akhbārī Qurʾān interpretation took for granted the perfidy of the first three Caliphs, as did other schools of Shīʿī exegesis.

One of the earliest occurrences of the idea of False Walāya is at verse 58:

> And when We said, 'Enter this township, and eat easefully of it wherever you will, and enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say, "Unburden us"; We will forgive you your transgressions, and increase the good-doers.' [Q 2:58]

Because the commentary on this verse contains several typical and significant elements, and because it is relatively concise, it is reproduced here in its entirety.[27]

> That which is intended (*wa-l-murād*) by township is the depth of the Exclusive Unity (*lujjat al-aḥadiyya*) and the gate (*bāb*) is ʿAlī, upon him be peace.[28]

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[26] Landolt, Walāyah 317.

[27] The following passage is found at *Baqara* 190–1.

[28] Cf. a later Bābī understanding of *al-qurā*, mentioned in MacEoin, From Shaykhism to Babism 171.

Verily the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his family, has said: "I am the city of wisdom (*ḥikma*) and ʿAlī is its gate."[29]

God commanded all people (*ahl al-imkān wa-l-akwān*) to ENTER THE TOWNSHIP of the sign of the prophethood of Muḥammad, may God bless him and his family, through allegiance to ʿAlī, upon him be peace, PROSTRATING to God and magnifying Him AND SAYING at the time of their confession of the *walāya* of ʿAlī, upon him be peace, "UNBURDEN US" (*ḥiṭṭatun*). That is to say: "[Give us] freedom (*barāʾatun*) from allegiance to the First (*walāyat al-awwal*) and his followers, may God curse them."

WE WILL FORGIVE YOU YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS resulting from allegiance to the False One (*walāyat al-bāṭil*) and WE WILL INCREASE the knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of the secrets (*asrār*) of ʿAlī, upon him be peace, . . . FOR THOSE WHO DO GOOD (*al-muḥsinīn*). The [true] muslim is the one who submits, with his whole being (*bi-kullihi*), to him (ʿAlī).

God has put in all created things a sign (*āya*) pertaining to His own self (*ʿan nafsihi*) and a city (*madīna*) pertaining to His Prophet (*ʿan nabiyyihi*). And He (God or Muḥammad?) fashioned the form of ʿAlī, upon him be peace, with His own hand at (*ʿalā*) the GATE of the city. And He commanded those who attain [the gate] to PROSTRATE to him (*li-nafsihi* = ʿAlī) through "the rending of veils and allusions (*bi-kashf al-subuḥāt wa-l-ishārāt*)" and to enter through this GATE by renouncing all but him (ʿAlī or God).

He who obeys his Lord according to these suggestions (*ishārāt*) is the one who truly says, "UNBURDEN US" [in the way the Qurʾān intends it]. And verily God will FORGIVE him to the extent that His knowledge encompasses the sin of the one who says, "UNBURDEN US" and He will INCREASE, through His power, his potential as much as such is possible in the contingent world.[30] There is no ceasing of the bounty of God (*fayḍ Allāh*). And he who enters through this GATE the Merciful will make lawful for him whatever he wants.[31] And to the grace of God there is no cease. And in this GATE he wants only what the Merciful wants. Therefore at the time of the ["creation of"] Will, the object of the Will is also created concomitantly (*bi-lā faṣl*). This is one of the bounties of God for the GOOD-DOERS.

The Imām al-Bāqir, upon whom be peace, said: "We are the gate of your repentance/forgiveness (*ḥiṭṭatikum*)."[32]

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[29] A very well-known tradition.

[30] *Baqara* 191: *fī ḥaqq al-imkān.*

[31] *Faqad ḥallala lahu al-raḥmān mā shāʾa*. Cf. the "they will have whatever they want" theme in the Qurʾān, e.g., Q 16:31.

[32] See al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104, #3 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #210. This verse also carries an "original Qurʾān" tradition, see al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104 #2 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #214.

> He who understands His [divine] speech (i.e. the Qur'ān) is the one who has understood the melody of his allusion: "I testify that they [all the Imāms] are the gate of repentance in all the worlds. And we submit to them."[33]

The implications this passage has for an understanding of the Bāb's eventual appropriation of the title "Gate" are obvious and this topic has been dealt with elsewhere.[34] It is clear from this interpretation, however, that False Walāya pertains not only to what the Shīʿa consider to have been the tragic turn in the history of Islam, but that it has implications for the inner life of the soul. Here the reference to Abū Bakr is read as a convenient symbol or personification of the otherwise abstract idea of misdirected belief.

The next specific mention of the False Walāya appears in the Bāb's commentary on Q 2:61. This long verse is one of the few that the Bāb quotes in sections. The commentary in question occurs at the third and final section:

> GO BACK IN SHAME TO EGYPT; YOU SHALL HAVE THERE WHAT YOU DEMANDED.' AND ABASEMENT AND POVERTY WERE PITCHED UPON THEM, AND THEY WERE LADEN WITH THE BURDEN OF GOD'S ANGER; THAT, BECAUSE THEY HAD DISBELIEVED THE SIGNS OF GOD AND SLAIN THE PROPHETS UNRIGHTFULLY; THAT, BECAUSE THEY DISOBEYED, AND WERE TRANSGRESSORS.
> When the people of the depth of the Inclusive Unity accepted that which was MEANER than the most exalted land (*balad al-aʿlā*), God CAST THEM DOWN [var. on GET YOU DOWN] from the depth of the *walāya* to the EGYPT of contingency.
>
> AND THE ABASEMENT of allusions (*ishārāt*) and the POVERTY of limitations (*ḥudūdāt*) WERE PITCHED UPON THEM. They merited [only] the False Walāya (*walāya bāṭila*) [at the time of] the Origination (*bi-ibdāʾ*) of the *walāya* of truth because they disbelieved in the *walāya* of ʿAlī, the Origin of all signs. Whoever disbelieves in his *walāya*, disbelieves in the signs of the Exclusive Unity and the tokens of the Inclusive Unity and the stations of *nubuwwa*. It is because of this disbelief that THEY KILLED THE PROPHETS WRONGFULLY. Because God made all the Prophets as rays of the sign of His *walī*, he who rejects his *walāya* has, at the time of such rejection, in fact KILLED THE PROPHETS.[35]

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[33] *Ashhadu an… inna naḥnu la-hum muslimūn*. I have not found the source for this quotation. It sounds like a verse from a devotional work such as *Ziyārat al-jāmiʿa al-kabīra*. It may also be the Bāb speaking in the first person, a rare but not unknown occurrence in this work.

[34] See Lawson, The Terms.

[35] *Baqara* 194.

Such a statement transposes the whole Sunnī/Shīʿī polemic, in which the first three caliphs suffer so much derision, to a metaphysical register quite beyond, though not necessarily excluding, the concerns of communalism. The "historical location" of the events referred to in Q 2:61 is meaningful for the Bāb insofar as it permits him to speak about more fundamental spiritual issues. By use of the term Inclusive Unity, it would appear that False Walāya here does not represent pure unalloyed evil; rather, it is seen as a lesser unity. And, it was because the "people of the Inclusive (or Restricted) Unity" themselves desired a lower station, that they were cast out by God from the true *walāya* into the "Egypt of the contingent world" (*miṣr al-imkān*). Thus, they brought upon themselves those afflictions mentioned in the verse.

False Walāya is further indicated at verse 67, which the Bāb has divided in two for the purposes of his commentary. Here the Qurʾān tells the story of Moses leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness. In particular, it tells of the rebelliousness of those who were given certain commandments by God through Moses. The specific command is to sacrifice a cow, and the episode itself is the subject of several successive verses. An excerpt from this commentary follows the citation of the entire verse:

> And when Moses said to his people, 'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said, 'Dost thou take us in mockery?' He said, 'I take refuge with God, lest I should be one of the ignorant.' [Q 2:67]
>
> When God commanded Muḥammad to communicate to the people of the contingent world [the order to] sacrifice the concerns and affairs of the self (*al-shuʾūnāt wa-l-aṭwār al-nafsāniyya*) and to turn their backs (*idbār*) to the False Walāya which is the cow, he communicated [it] on the eighteenth day of the month of pilgrimage that which he was commanded to [communicate] by his Lord.[36]

The Bāb then cites a portion of the Farewell Pilgrimage sermon, which represents for him, it seems, not only a re-articulation of the basic theme of the verse but more importantly, the true type of covenant-taking by which all others must be measured, including the so-called primordial event described at Q 7:172.[37] The implication here is that while the verse in one of its intentions actually refers to the history of Moses, its more

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[36] *Baqara* 201. Note here the use of *idbār*, a possible allusion to the famous *ʿaql* tradition on which see now K. Crow, Islam and Reason.

[37] The association of the *walāya* of ʿAlī with the primordial covenant is a reading common to Akhbārī *tafsīr*: al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 2, 46–51 *ad* 7:172: And when the Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them

important significance should be seen in connection with the so-called salvation history of the Shīʿa. In this way, history itself is seen to be unified, if not actually an illusion altogether in the sense that time is an illusion and that all these apparently separate and discrete events share the same meta-temporal ground. The point is made through the incessant use of typological figuration. The celebrated passage from the Farewell Pilgrimage is:

> Whoever I am the master of [The Bāb adds here: 'in the worlds of unity (*ʿawālim al-waḥda*)'] then this man ʿAlī is his master (*mawlāhu*). O God, befriend him who befriends him and be an enemy to him who is enemy to him. Assist to victory whoever assists him to victory, and abandon (*khadhala*) him whoever abandons him.[38]

Both Sunnī and Shīʿī sources cite this tradition (and several variants) as a sound report. It has, however, been subject to various interpretations due, mainly, to the wide semantic range of the word *mawlā*. However, because of its status as a widely attested report (*mutawātir*) this passage has been cited by the Shīʿa from the earliest times as a proof-text for their claims.[39]

Walāya is that by which a human's distinctive (if not sacred) faculty of choice (*ikhtiyār*) is exercised. In this respect, all human beings, it would appear, are created equal. Several verses are interpreted by the Bāb as upholding this principle, for example his commentary on the following:

> So woe to those who write the Book with their hands, then say, 'This is from God,' that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings. [Q 2:79]

Here the Bāb says that all created things were WRITING "the excellence (*faḍl*) of ʿAlī WITH THEIR HANDS "by means of what they chose for themselves." At some point, however, certain ones abandoned the Exclusive Unity of the *walāya* of ʿAlī and brought WOE upon themselves by WRITING his "excellence" (*faḍl*) with their own hands. That is, they distorted his excellence by ascribing it to someone else. The *walāya* of ʿAlī, for having been acknowledged but rejected by them, will destroy them. This is the meaning of SELLING FOR A LITTLE PRICE. On the other hand, those who

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TESTIFY . . .; cf. also al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 463–7 *ad* 5:3: TODAY I HAVE PERFECTED YOUR RELIGION FOR YOU . . .

[38] *Baqara* 201. See al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād* 124.

[39] See Landolt, Walāyah, and the reference there to the *Hāshimiyyāt* of al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (126/743), 318. See also L. Vaccia Veglieri, Ghadīr Khumm.

remained in this Exclusive Unity continued to benefit from this virtue or excellence (*faḍl*). The Qur'ānic Woe (*al-wayl*) is itself a direct reference to and synonym for False Walāya, and the fact that it is mentioned three times refers to the successive caliphates of "the First, Second, and Third."[40] Here it is clear that False Walāya is not restricted to one personality, but like Absolute Walāya, it represents an enduring perhaps ontic principle. The following passages present the same "dangerous" aspects of the *walāya* of ʿAlī. In the first example it is characterized as a punishment:

> And they say, 'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days.' [Q 2:80]
>
> Those who love the false *walāya* [or the *walāya* of the false one] have indeed worshipped the calf (*al-ʿijl*). And they say, 'The Fire shall not touch us that is (*ay*) the *walāya* of ʿAlī, save a number of days during the lifetime of the Messenger of God.[41]

This refers to the duplicity of those who accepted the Prophet's nomination of ʿAlī at Ghadīr Khumm, only to renege later. Among them, according to Shīʿī tradition, was the arch villain ʿUmar himself:

> Among those who were profuse in their congratulations on his position was ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. He gave a public appearance of great joy at it, saying: "Bravo, bravo, ʿAlī, you have become my master and the master of every believing man and woman."[42]

The subject arises again in the commentary on the following verse:

> When there has come to them a Messenger from God confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the Book reject the Book of God behind their backs, as though they knew not. [Q 2:101]

This verse is interpreted as referring to Muḥammad's bringing the imperative of "servitude to his self" (*bi-l-ʿubūdiyya li-nafsihi*) in the realm of timeless Origination, which confirms not only that which is with you, but "that which came before and that which will come after you." However, a party of those to whom God had given the "possibility of shining by

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[40] *Baqara* 219–20. It is surely not accidental to the *tafsīr* offered here that the word *wayl* represents a "corruption" of the word *walī*.

[41] *Baqara* 220. Note how fire is transformed into a positive value, force as the "*walāya* of ʿAlī".

[42] al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād* 125.

following the *walāya* of ʿAlī," REJECT THE BOOK of his *walāya* BEHIND the False Walāya.[43]

At verse 102, the Bāb makes a series of comments relevant to the frequently encountered notions of Exclusive and Inclusive Unity. Here the terms are seen to refer to True and False Walāya respectively. It is interesting that in this way, even False Walāya has some positive aspects:

> SOLOMON DISBELIEVED NOT, BUT THE SATANS DISBELIEVED, TEACHING THE PEOPLE SORCERY, AND THAT WHICH WAS SENT DOWN UPON BABYLON'S TWO ANGELS, HARUT AND MARUT; THEY TAUGHT NOT ANY MAN, WITHOUT THEY SAID, 'WE ARE BUT A TEMPTATION; DO NOT DISBELIEVE.' FROM THEM THEY LEARNED HOW THEY MIGHT DIVIDE A MAN AND HIS WIFE, YET THEY DID NOT HURT ANY MAN THEREBY, SAVE BY THE LEAVE OF GOD, AND THEY LEARNED WHAT HURT THEM, AND DID NOT PROFIT THEM, KNOWING WELL THAT WHOSO BUYS IT SHALL HAVE NO SHARE IN THE WORLD TO COME; EVIL THEN WAS THAT WHICH THEY SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, IF THEY HAD BUT KNOWN. [Q 2:102]
>
> AND THAT WHICH WAS SENT DOWN UPON BABYLON'S TWO ANGELS, HARUT AND MARUT; THEY LEARNED, FROM THE TWO, HOW THEY MIGHT DIVIDE A MAN AND HIS WIFE, is an allusion to the one who abides in the land of the Two Gulfs[44] because it is he who understands [the relationship between] the Exclusively Unitary Lordship and the servitude of the self.[45] Yet they, i.e., the people of the Inclusive Unity, did no HARM in the place where the perception of his Lord occurs,[46] namely through the *walāya* of ANY ONE of the Infernal Imāms, SAVE BY THE LEAVE OF GOD, that is (*ay*) the *walāya* of ʿAlī.
>
> And he who FOLLOWS the *walāya* of the False One, has indeed LEARNED WHAT HURT him, from hating the Truth[47] AND [that the only thing which] PROFITS him (i.e., the only thing he gains) is Hell and the deprivation (*ḥirmān*) of the meeting with God.[48]

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[43] *Baqara* 242.

[44] I.e., ʿAlī: *al-wāqif fī arḍ al-taṭanjayn*. On the famous, influential and highly abstruse Sermon of the Two Gulfs (*Khuṭbat al-taṭanjiyya* or *tuṭunjiyya* or *tuṭanjiyya*) see the pioneering study of Corbin in *Intineraire* 113–18. See also the comments in Lawson, The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty. For the importance of this motif in the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

[45] *L* 18: *mushʿir bi-l-rubūbiyya al-aḥadiyya wa-l-ʿubūdiyya al-nafsāniyya; Baqara* 245: *mushʿiratun*. . . . On ʿAlī and the *arḍ al-taṭanjayn*, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse* ch. 3.

[46] *Fī mashʿari al-naẓari bi-rabbi-hi min aḥadin*. On the translation of *mashʿar* see Corbin, *Le livre des pénétrations* 41–4.

[47] So *L* 18: *mā yaḍurruhu ʿan bughḍ al-ḥaqq; Baqara* 245 and *I* 338: *mā yaḍurruhu ʿan buʿd al-ḥaqq*; cf. 91b: *mā yaḍurruhu baʿd al-ḥaqq*.

[48] *Baqara* 245.

Some notice of the way the Bāb introduces these comments is in order, inasmuch as they may reveal something of the way he saw himself at this time:

> As for the *tafsīr* of this blessed verse, it is as profound as the profundity of Origination itself, glorified be its Originator. And behold! I am the one who can explain its reality and wisdom.[49]

Walāya of the First, Second, and Third

In the above discussion of False Walāya, the term Walāya of the First (*walāyat al-awwal*) was encountered. As mentioned above, this designation has a double reference. On the historical level, it alludes to the fact of Abū Bakr's acceptance of the caliphate upon the death of Muḥammad, becoming thereby the first successor to the Prophet. In what Corbin calls the metahistorical dimension, we have already seen that this primacy also refers to the first act of disobedience at the time of the creation of Adam, when God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before the first man. Taken in this sense, the figure of Abū Bakr acquires the features of the symbol of a cosmic principle of rebelliousness to God's command, which puts him quite beyond the concerns of simple sectarian polemic.[50] In addition to these two aspects of the designation "First," the term carries with it a certain element of irony in that as a theological term, it is one of the recognized names (*asmā'*) of God.[51] Furthermore, in normal discourse, it is used as a positive adjective of primacy in the sense of "foremost" or "most important." Is this another case of apocalyptic reversal at the level of semantics/rhetoric? The word is used frequently in this last sense in the *tafsīr*, as for example at verse 3, in the Bāb's discussion of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), where the Bāb says that *ṣalāt* is the first or foremost station of distinction between God and the lover.[52]

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[49] *Baqara* 244. Such statements, while not frequent, occur several times in the *tafsīr*.

[50] For example, his identification as Iblīs brings with it a whole series of extremely complex questions revolving around the problem of the way this figure is to be understood in: [1] The Qur'ān, [2] Islamic Theology, [3] Mysticism and Theosophy, and the implications all this might have for an adequate appreciation of the problem of evil in Islamicate philosophy. For an introduction to the figure of "the devil" in Islam, see P. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*.

[51] E.g., Q 57:3: He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward.

[52] *Baqara* 25.

By way of further clarification, the Bāb discusses the Qur'ānic *al-ākhira*, which may be thought of as the opposite of *al-awwal*. At verse 4, the Bāb says of the word HEREAFTER that it is in fact a designation of ʿAlī. His *walāya* is the thing that was revealed to Muḥammad, and God has raised no prophet, nor revealed any book or command, except through the *walāya* of ʿAlī.[53] Thus it would appear to carry the idea of "I am the alpha and the omega" with the emphasis here on omega.

One of the earliest allusions to the *walāya* of the First is found in the Bāb's commentary at verse 24. This is one of the so-called *taḥaddī* verses in which those who doubt the divine source of Muḥammad's revelation are challenged to produce something comparable:

> IF YOU DO NOT—AND YOU WILL NOT—THEN FEAR THE FIRE, WHOSE FUEL IS MEN AND STONES, PREPARED FOR UNBELIEVERS. [Q 2:24]

Interestingly, the Bāb shifts the reference away from the Qur'ānic challenge, and discusses the verse in the following terms:

> God [here] provides information [*akhbara*] about their *kufr* [and His statement may be phrased this way]: "IF YOU DO NOT accept the depth of the Exclusive Unity in the contingent aspect of your beings (*imkānikum*) THEN YOU WILL NEVER recognize the absolute *walāya* of ʿAlī in the actualized aspect of your beings (*akwānikum*). THEN FEAR [heed > *ittaqū*] THE FIRE of the call (*daʿwa*) of Ḥusayn on the Day of Ashura. And if you do not HEED, God will make this retreat (*idbār*) the FIRE of the love of the First (*maḥabbat al-awwal*), [and] WHOSE FUEL, is the Second (ʿUmar) AND STONES [will be] the Third (ʿUthmān). God has PREPARED the love (*ḥubb*) of these three FOR UNBELIEVERS.[54]

Although the word *walāya* is not used here, a substitute or related term "love" (*maḥabba*, i.e., of the First), is clearly opposed to the idea of the Absolute Walāya of ʿAlī. The commentary on this verse also carries one of the earliest references to the related negative designations of the "Second" and the "Third," and illustrates one of the more frequent exegetical techniques used by the Bāb, who many times exploits a series of substantives in order to more fully elaborate his theme. Here the Qur'ānic FIRE, FUEL, AND STONES are each considered separately. Through the sin of ingratitude (*kufr*), love is transformed into an infernal flame. It is not clear whether the equating of ʿUmar with FUEL, while ʿUthmān is associated with STONES, represents a significant gradation. One of the more important

[53] *Baqara* 35.
[54] *Baqara* 85.

aspects of this section of the Bāb's commentary is the equivalence *walāya*/*maḥabba*. Either term can be positive or negative, as in the case here of wrongly-directed love, which ultimately becomes Fire. Love as a synonym for *walāya* is of course not new with the Bāb,[55] but it is important that this aspect of *walāya* be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power" in perspective.[56] It is this equivalence that led Corbin to state that Shīʿism is pre-eminently a religion of love.[57] This is, of course, a very large assertion and one that must be considered in the somewhat rarified context of Corbin's key sources. However, insofar as devotion to the *walāya* of the Imām represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion stands. In the commentary immediately preceding this section, the idea of primal evil is also brought out:

> And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura like it, and call your witnesses, apart from God, if you are truthful. [Q 2:23]

Doubt (*rayb*), we are told, is the quality of the First (*ṣifat al-awwal*) and his followers.[58] The verse is then paraphrased:

> O those of you who are in doubt and non-recognition[59] concerning that which was sent down upon Our servant Muḥammad touching the *walāya* of ʿAlī! [If you are in doubt] then search through all the contingent worlds. Is it possible that there is anyone equal to ʿAlī in the matter of the caliphate? If it is possible, then prove it through your witnesses (*fa-ʿtarifū bi-shuhadāʾi-kum*) from among those you have set up as signs of your Lord (*āyāt rabbikum*) aside from ʿAlī, if you are truthful.[60]

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[55] E.g., the discussion of *walāya* in al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahāni, *Tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār* 337–8. The author also says that *wilāya* means "assistance" (*al-nuṣra*), and *walāya* means "sovereignty" (*al-imāra, al-sulṭān*). On *maḥabba* as descriptive of the dynamic which binds the believer to his Imām, whether true or false, see Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī, *Ziyāra* 190.

[56] "Love" corresponds to allegiance, i.e., *tawallin*, or "following"; it goes from the lower to the higher. "Authority" proceeds from the higher to the lower. On the several intentions of *walāya*, see Landolt, Walāyah.

[57] Corbin, *En Islam iranien* 1, 329.

[58] *Baqara* 84. *Furūʿ* = "followers".

[59] *Inkār*, the classic term used to describe the attitude of the early enemies of the Shīʿa who refused to acknowledge ʿAlī.

[60] *Baqara* 84.

At this commentary "love" is also associated with *walāya*. The Bāb says:

> None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (*luǰǰat al-aḥadiyya*) except by means of his (ʿAlī's) *walāya*. It is the goal (*maqṣūd*) of your existence (*wujūdi-kum*), because God has made you for the sake of this love (*maḥabba*). And He has put His life (*ḥayātuhu*) and His glory (*ʿizzuhu*) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world—IF ONLY YOU WERE TRUTHFUL—(MEANING) IF ONLY YOU KNEW.[61]

At verse 27, the First is identified as the one who first broke the covenant of God (not in historical time but in primordial time), and as such has significance for the above-mentioned metahistorical dimension of sacred history:

> SUCH AS BREAK THE COVENANT OF GOD AFTER ITS SOLEMN BINDING, AND SUCH AS CUT WHAT GOD HAS COMMANDED SHOULD BE JOINED, AND SUCH AS DO CORRUPTION IN THE LAND—THEY SHALL BE THE LOSERS. [Q 2:27]

The Bāb says that the phrase: THOSE WHO BROKE THE COVENANT refers to the COVENANT (*ʿahd*) of Muḥammad, about the signs of ʿAlī and was instituted in the world of *al-ghayb:*

> These signs were placed within (*fī*) the atoms (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqām*) of *tawḥīd*, and [in] the atoms of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of *nubuwwa*, and [in] the atoms of souls [which represents] the abode of *imāma*, and [in] the atoms of the bodies [which represents] the place (*maḥall*) of the love of the Shīʿa AFTER God imposed this SOLEMN BINDING upon all created things [which is] faith in Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Jaʿfar, Mūsā, and Fāṭima. THEY SHALL BE the disbelievers (*kāfirūn* instead of *KHĀSIRŪN*, all *mss.*).[62]
>
> The first who broke the covenant of God in the contingent world in all of its stations, from the sign of *tawḥīd* to the last limit of multiplicity was Abū al-Dawāhī, may God curse him. He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends in the worlds of AL-GHAYB and CUT the *walāya* of ʿAlī in his visible manifestations (*fī maẓāhirihi, sic*) namely the Imāms of the visible world (*aʾimmat al-shahāda*) . . .[63]

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[61] *Baqara* 84–5.

[62] *Baqara* 94. This statement is of course an affirmation of the doctrine of the four supports for which the Shaykhiyya is well known. On the spiritual significance of *dharr* in early Ṣūfism, see G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*. "Atoms" is not a completely satisfactory translation, "seeds" being more suited to the idea of "development" which is intended here.

[63] *Baqara* 94–5.

With this commentary we encounter another designation of Abū Bakr—Abū al-Dawāhī. The Bāb refers to the first Caliph this way throughout the commentary, just as ʿUmar is often called Abū al-Shurūr ("Father of Evils"). It is not likely that these derogatory names are inventions of the Bāb.[64]

At verse 34, in one of the several brief citations of the famous *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya* that appear in the *tafsīr*, the *khuṭba* is quoted in connection with the Divine command to the angels to prostrate before Adam. All of the angels bowed except Iblīs, "that is the First, and he is the one about whom ʿAlī said: 'Verily Ibn Abī Quḥāfa,'—and he is Abū al-Dawāhī—'assumed the mantle (*la-qad taqammaṣahā*)' [i.e., of the caliphate]."[65] This *Khuṭba* is found in the canonical *Nahj al-balāgha* and is referred to often by Shīʿī writers. It begins as follows:

> By God! that man snatched the caliphate as if it were a garment which could be put on by him, while all the while he knew that my station was like that of the pivot (*quṭb*) of the grinding stone.[66]

Although no name, apart from *fulān* ("so-and-so") is mentioned here, the statement is universally understood as referring to Abū Bakr, as ʿAbduh himself points out.[67] The *Khuṭba* continues to explain how the next two Caliphs wrongfully usurped ʿAlī's position and the reasons for which this was tolerated by the Imām. The title of the sermon is derived in the following way. ʿAlī's condemnation and lament was interrupted by the arrival of a messenger with a letter which ʿAlī then read, breaking off the address. After ʿAlī had read the letter, Ibn ʿAbbās asked him to resume his theme to which the Imām replied: "In no way, in no way. It was like the foam on the camel's mouth (*shiqshiqa*) as it opens its mouth to bellow and then falls silent."[68]

The next mention of the First occurs at verses 41 and 42, which are separated in the text by their respective commentaries, but are presented together here for convenience:

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[64] The first three Caliphs are frequently called *fulān* in the Akhbārī literature which has been published. Whether the manuscript sources of this literature contain other less neutral names, is something that can only be speculated upon.

[65] *Baqara* 131–2.

[66] The edition used here is the one by Muḥammad ʿAbduh and printed in Beirut (n.d.) 1, 30–8, material translated found on 30–1. Cf. al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-irshād* 212, where Ibn Abī Quḥāfa (Abū Bakr) is mentioned by name.

[67] *Nahj al-balāgha* 1, 31.

[68] *Nahj al-balāgha* 1, 37 as translated in al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-irshād* 213.

> AND BELIEVE IN THAT WHICH I HAVE SENT DOWN, CONFIRMING THAT WHICH IS WITH YOU, AND BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT. AND SELL NOT MY SIGNS FOR A LITTLE PRICE; AND FEAR YOU ME. [Q 2:41] AND DO NOT CONFOUND THE TRUTH WITH VANITY, AND DO NOT CONCEAL THE TRUTH WITTINGLY. [Q 2:42]

The FIRST [here positive!] that was sent down from God was the sign of the Divine Ipseity (*āyat hūwiyya*). And it[69] is the sign of the *walāya* belonging to ʿAlī (*li-ʿAlī*). And it is this sign[70] which is CONFIRMING[71] THAT WHICH IS WITH YOU through servitude to God.

And God placed the pre-existent form[72] of this sign in all created things, for [effecting] faith thereby in order that he [the individual thing] might annihilate[73] and forget all things through its undying holiness (*li-baqāʾi-hā*) and its (the *āya*'s) REMEMBRANCE.

And he who turned away from it (*aʿraḍa ʿanhā*), was THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT[74] (*walāya* or *āya*). [And none in *al-imkān* but Abū al-Dawāhī, may the curse of God be upon him, turned away from it FIRST. And for that reason, he became THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN HIM/IT].[75]

And God commanded His servants to BE NOT (*lā takūnū*) like him, because whoever turns away from the sign of the Family of God becomes (*fa-huwa*) a sign of the First, and becomes [also] THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT.[76]

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[69] *Baqara* 169; *I* 278 and *L* 5 = *hiya*; cf. 69a = *huwa*.

[70] It is important to bear in mind the two meanings of *āya*: sign or verse. The statement undoubtedly connotes a reference to those verses which are interpreted by the Shīʿa to be "explicit" confirmations of ʿAlī's appointment by Muḥammad, e.g., Q 5:55.

[71] Cf. 69a = *muṣaddiq*^{an} as Qurʾān. All other *mss.: musaddiqat*^{an} to agree with *āya*.

[72] *Shabaḥ*, but it is susceptible of eventual life.

[73] *Baqara* 169: *yafnā*; cf. 63b: *nafā*.

[74] Cf. 63b: *bi-hi*; all other *mss.*= *bi-hā*.

[75] [—] represents a lacuna in cf. 63b. This folio contains several errors or variants and it is therefore doubtful that this gap represents any attempt at bowdlerization. Other errors on this folio to be found are at lines 4–6, which present an exact duplication of the previous four lines and the variants mentioned in the two previous notes. Perhaps this portion of the *ms.* was written under some kind of stress?

[76] *Baqara* 169. Cf. al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 91, #2 where a similar idea is conveyed by referring to Abū Bakr as "*fulān*". This particular *khabar* is of some interest. It is preserved in ʿAyyāshī's *tafsīr* on the authority of the important disciple of al-Ṣādiq, Jābir al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745) who asked the Imām al-Bāqir about the explanation of the verse from the esoteric point of view (*saʾaltu Abā Jaʿfar ʿan tafsīr hādhihi-l-āyat fī bāṭin al-Qurʾān*). The Imām's response helps us understand exactly how the word *bātin* was used: "AND BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN HIM, that is, so-and-so and his companion (*ṣāḥib*), and whoever follows him and subjects himself to their claim (*wa man dāna bi-dīni-him*). God reproves such by saying BE NOT THE FIRST TO DISBELIEVE IN IT, that is [the pronoun stands for] ʿAlī."

> And those who SELL THE SIGNS of God by looking to other than the Family of God, have SOLD FOR A SMALL PRICE [which is the price of] the vision of *walāya* itself (or, the *āya* itself: *bi-ruʾyati nafsi-hā*).[77]
>
> Verily he who accepts (*al-rāḍī*) permanence (*baqāʾ*) in the stages (*aṭwār*) of the *ṭamṭām* of the Inclusive Unity of the stations (*maqāmāt*) of Mercifulness, such a one has then SOLD the signs of the Exclusive Unity for the PRICE OF the Inclusive Unity. And this is [a] SMALL [price].[78]
>
> And ME (*iyyāya*) is (*ay*) the depth (*lujja*) of the Exclusive Unity.
>
> And FEAR YE [refers to the fact] that the servant will never perfect pious fear (*taqwā*) except when he is firmly established in the cloud (*ʿamā*) of the Eternal Refuge (*al-ṣamadiyya*). Otherwise, as long as he continues to travel throughout the *aṭwār* of the Inclusive Unity he will continue to abide (*huwa al-wāqif*) in the station of limitation (*mashʿar al-ḥadd*). And God has forbidden the People of Love (*ahl al-maḥabba*) from this station (*al-mawqif*) with His statement FEAR YOU ME.[79]
>
> The word of God (*kalām al-ḥaqq*) is the creation (*ījād*) of the thing. And the TRUTH (*al-ḥaqq*) is the *walāya* of ʿAlī and the VANITY (*al-bāṭil*) is the *walāya* of the First. God commanded His servants: "Do not try to understand

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[77] I.e., they have lost the vision of ʿAlī and gained a small price instead. *Baqara* 169–70. The act of regarding anything else, insofar as anything else is incapable of satisfying spiritual need, is a trifling recompense. N.b. cf. 63b: *bi-āyati nafsihi*.

[78] The Bāb adapts the grammar of the Qurʾān to mean that price is now the thing acquired. *Baqara* 170. These terms have been dealt with elsewhere, except for perhaps *aṭwār*, plural of *ṭawr*. On this word in *ʿAyn al-Quḍāt* see T. Izutsu, Creation and the Timeless Order of Things 126; cf. Isfarāyinī, *Le Rélévateur des mystères*, q.v. index "coeur, sphères du, *adwār-i dil*".

[79] The term *ʿamā* has a rich and complex history. As this word is frequently encountered in the writings of the Bāb, Bahāʾullāh, and other Bahāʾī authors, some reference to this history is in order. The word figures in a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet:

> He was asked: "Where was our Lord before He created creation?" The Prophet answered: "In *al-ʿamā* having no air above or beneath it."

A part of this tradition is quoted by Ibn ʿArabī (*Fuṣūṣ* 1, 111) and al-Kāshānī, who cites it in a shorter form (the editor of *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt* gives a variant: "... having air above it and beneath it.") in the above form, comments as follows:

> *al-ʿamā* is the level (*ḥaḍra*) of the Exclusive Unity, according to us.... It is said that it is the level of the Inclusive Unity which is the place where the divine names and attributes appear, because *al-ʿamā* is a thin cloud (*al-ghaim al-raqīq*), and this cloud is a screen between heaven and earth. Therefore this level is a screen between the heaven of the Exclusive Unity and the earth of creaturely multiplicity, about which not even the [above] *ḥadīth* from the Prophet is very helpful. (al-Kāshānī, *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt* 131–2.)

Izutsu's translation, "abysmal darkness" (*Sufism and Taoism* 119) and Austin's "The Dark Cloud" (*The Bezels of Wisdom* 134) do not convey the diaphanous quality which al-Kāshānī emphasizes, suggesting a thin cloud at such a high altitude that it seems to appear and disappear from one moment to the next. A recent discussion of the use of the term in Bābī and Bahāʾī literature is Lambden, An Early Poem of Mirza Husayn ʿAli Bahāʾu'llāh.

> the sign of your own *tawḥīd* by means of a quality of the contingent world (*ṣifat al-imkān*), nor be oblivious of the depth of the Exclusive Unity, WITTINGLY."
>
> Verily, whatever is other than it is VANITY, while it is the TRUTH and the ultimate goal of the bounty of the Lord (*fayḍ al-rabb*).
>
> And the one who looks with other than the eye of God CONFOUNDS TRUTH WITH VANITY and CONCEALS THE TRUTH after God had taught him the *walāya* of ʿAlī, . . . THEN HOW ARE YOU TURNED ABOUT (Q 10:32).[80]

Another mention of the First, in connection with the topic of *walāya*, is at verse 51:

> AND WHEN WE APPOINTED WITH MOSES FORTY NIGHTS, THEN YOU TOOK TO YOURSELVES THE CALF AFTER HIM AND YOU WERE EVILDOERS. [Q 2:51]

Here MOSES means Muḥammad and the FORTY NIGHTS represent ʿAlī, who lived for "thirty years after the death of Muḥammad" plus the ten "Proofs" (*ḥujaj*) who were his progeny and successors. Together these eleven Imāms represent the period when "their glory was concealed by the darkness of disbelief" (i.e, the FORTY NIGHTS). The CALF (*al-ʿijl*) is none other than Abū al-Dawāhī. Finally, this darkness of disbelief will be relieved by the advent (*ẓuhūr*) of the Day of the Qā'im. "When God causes his Cause (*amr*) to come forth, what I have only hinted at will clearly appear."[81]

Similar comments may be found throughout the *tafsīr*, notably at Q 2:58, where the TRANSGRESSIONS which God promises to FORGIVE are precisely those resulting from the *walāyat al-bāṭil*. Here *walāya* would seem to mean the "act" of following the wrong Imām.[82] Reference is again made to the *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya* in the commentary on Q 2:59, where the EVILDOERS are those who SUBSTITUTED A SAYING (*qawl*) by following the one who WRONGLY "put on the mantle of the caliphate."[83] Here the Bāb also invokes the Shīʿī *taḥrīf al-Qur'ān* tradition:

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[80] *Baqara* 170–1. The complete verse is: THAT THEN IS GOD, YOUR LORD, THE TRUE; WHAT IS THERE, AFTER TRUTH, BUT ERROR? THEN HOW ARE YOU TURNED ABOUT? The allusion is particularly deft because of the obvious similarity in terminology, obvious only to those who "swim in the sea of the Qur'ān," because the first part of the verse is not mentioned!

[81] A possible reference to the Bāb's future claims. *Baqara* 183–4. On the connotations of *Ẓuhūr* see al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* 227, where in addition to the ideas of "appearance" and "advent," are mentioned "dispensation" and "victory" and where its *ta'wīl* is related to *al-bāb*.

[82] *Baqara* 190. See below, however, where the Bāb says that disbelief in the *walāya* of ʿAlī will never be forgiven.

[83] *Baqara* 191.

> Abū Jaʿfar said: "Gabriel originally brought this verse to Muḥammad in the following way: 'The evildoers substituted the right of the family of Muḥammad with a statement which had not been said to them. So We sent down upon those who perpetrated evil against the family of Muḥammad wrath out of heaven for their ungodliness.'"[84]

This tradition is found in three of the four major *Akhbārī* commentaries studied at length elsewhere.[85] Not only does its use here by the Bāb indicate that our author probably consulted other commentaries while writing this one, but it presents a good example of the way in which *Akhbārī* commentators bolstered their claim that "the Qurʾān which we have in our hands is not the whole Qurʾān."[86]

The commentary on verse 79 identifies the three separate mentions of WOE (*al-wayl*) with the first three caliphs.[87] Elsewhere we are told that the refusal to recognize (*inkār*) the *walāya* of ʿAlī is accounted by God as "all transgressions." He who, in verse 81 is described as being ENCOMPASSED BY HIS TRANSGRESSION is in this condition because he EARNED "the *walāya* of the First." Similarly, the FIRE OF HELL is the subsequent "*walāya* of the Second."[88] To explain further this verse, the Bāb quotes a *ḥadīth* from an anonymous Imām:

> When they disputed the Imāmate of the Commander of the Faithful THOSE WERE THE INHABITANTS OF THE FIRE, THERE THEY SHALL DWELL FOREVER.[89]

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[84] *Baqara* 191.

[85] Lawson, Akhbari Shiʿi Approaches to Tafsir.

[86] For this particular report ascribed to the fifth Imām, see: Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfī* 32–3; al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 104, #2; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 70, #214. Curiously, the only *ḥadīth* presented for this verse in *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* is Burhān #2. The *isnād* may be of some interest: Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb (i.e., Kulaynī); Aḥmad ibn Mihrān (3rd cent. traditionist); ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh; Muḥammad ibn al-Fuḍayl (follower of al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā and Riḍā. Regarded as reliable); Abū Ḥamza (Naṣīr al-Khādim seems to have been a servant of al-ʿAskarī; or, al-Thumālī (Thābit b. Dīnār) follower of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq; al-Bāqir. (Information on these figures is taken from al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād*, q.v. biographical index.)

al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 25, speaks of Jews and Christians as the *fāsiqīn* intended here. Somewhat closer to the tradition in the Bāb's *tafsīr* is *al-ʿAskarī*, margin of al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 87. He identifies the WRONGDOERS as those who were not accounted in the *walāya* of Muḥammad and ʿAlī, and their descendents.

[87] *Baqara* 219–20, quoted above.

[88] *Baqara* 221.

[89] *Baqara* 221. This *ḥadīth* is found in al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 160, #2 and al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 79, #258.

The Bāb then says:

> And the secret of the thing I will now explain. It is that the Garden which the Merciful promised to His servants, to all others equally, [including] the Family of God, is the shade of the body of Ḥusayn.
>
> And the seven hells are similarly for the First and his manifestation (*maẓhar*). Verily God created them from the *kufr* of the body of al-Yazīd[90] (*sic*) may he be accursed and chastised.[91]
>
> He who confesses to the *walāya* of ʿAlī will have entered the [paradise of the] GOOD PLEASURE [of God] (*al-riḍwān*), and he who rejects will have entered the Fires [of Hell] (*al-nīrān*). And that is the order of things firmly established (*taqdīr maḥtūm*) by one Mighty, Wise.[92]

At the commentary on verse 85, we find another mention of these three:

> THEN THERE YOU ARE KILLING ONE ANOTHER, AND EXPELLING A PARTY OF YOU FROM THEIR HABITATIONS, CONSPIRING AGAINST THEM IN SIN AND ENMITY; AND IF THEY COME TO YOU AS CAPTIVES, YOU RANSOM THEM; YET THEIR EXPULSION WAS FORBIDDEN YOU. WHAT, DO YOU BELIEVE IN PART OF THE BOOK, AND DISBELIEVE IN PART? WHAT SHALL BE THE RECOMPENSE OF THOSE OF YOU WHO DO THAT, BUT DEGRADATION IN THE PRESENT LIFE, AND ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION TO BE RETURNED UNTO THE MOST TERRIBLE OF CHASTISEMENT? AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS YOU DO. [Q 2:85]
>
> And the addressee (*al-mukhāṭab*) is the First and his companions [with the meaning]: YOU KILLED THE sign of ʿAlī, despite what God placed in YOURSELVES (*anfusi-kum*) after the Messenger of God had already taught you, "who of you knows best his self, is he who knows best his Lord"[93]
>
> . . . But, you were CONSPIRING AGAINST THEM with the polytheists by means of the *walāya* of SIN AND ENMITY. And SIN is the Second and ENMITY is the Third.
>
> AND IF THEY COME TO YOU AS CAPTIVES—namely the people who do not know the Imām—YOU RANSOM THEM with the *walāya* of YOURSELVES. And in the estimation of God, this has been FORBIDDEN (*muḥarram*) TO YOU. Thus YOU EXPELLED THEM FROM the *walāya* of ʿAlī, after you had acquainted

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[90] *Sic*. The reference is to Yazīd, son of and successor to the first Umayyad caliph Muʿawiyya. He was the caliph responsible for the massacre of Ḥusayn, his family and entourage at Karbalā' in 681. On the importance of this event in Shīʿī Heilsgeschichte see M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*.

[91] *Baqara* 222, and all *mss.: min kufri jismi-l-Yazīd.*

[92] *Baqara* 221–2. Quite apart from its content, the tone of this first-person statement by the Bāb could suggest that he is claiming access to divine knowledge.

[93] *Baqara* 226–7: *aʿrafukum bi-nafsihi aʿarafukum bi-rabbihi.*

them with the *nubuwwa* of Muḥammad, for the sake of your own trusteeship (*wiṣāya*).

WHAT, DO YOU BELIEVE IN SOME OF THE BOOK after God has already taught you that it (*innahā* = "false *wiṣāya*") is an ACCURSED TREE [Q 17:60] in the Qurʾān?[94]

AND DISBELIEVE IN PART after God had already taught you that IN THE MOTHER OF THE BOOK, WITH US IT/HE IS ʿALĪ INDEED, WISE.[95]

AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS YOU DO in "donning the mantle" of *walāya* (*qamīṣ al-walāya*) by usurping it for themselves.[96]

And they will meet with the justice of ʿAlī for their wrongdoing. He who veils anyone from the Remembrance of God, or the Remembrance of the Family of God, or the Remembrance of their Shīʿa, then [he] will expel him from his HABITATIONS, AND HIS REWARD ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION will be THE MOST TERRIBLE CHASTISEMENT, for what their hands have earned.[97] AND GOD IS NOT HEEDLESS OF THE THINGS they DO.

And verily al-Ṣādiq said, concerning the external (*ẓāhir*) meaning, that this verse was sent down about Abū Dharr, may God be merciful to him, and ʿUthmān.[98]

This *ḥadīth* deals only with the exoteric aspects (*wa amru-hu ẓāhirun*), and this is not the place (*al-maqām*) for the (full) revelation of its meaning (*li-iẓhāri amri-hi*). The point is that the universal fundamental principles (*qawāʾidu kulliyyatun*) have rained down (*tarashshaha*) in this verse. The

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[94] Cf. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* 267 where Goldziher points out that the "*shajaratun maʿlūnatun*" is identified in some early Shīʿī *tafsīr* with the Umayyads.

[95] *Baqara* 227. The reference here is to Q 43:4: *wa innahu fī ummi-l-kitābi ladaynā la-ʿaliyyun ḥakīmun*. In the Qurʾān, the pronoun refers to *al-kitāb al-mubīn* and *qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan*. It seems clear from the context that this translation is justified. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 30, who cites material upholding the idea that the name ʿAlī is directly derived from the Divine name *al-ʿAlī* and that such a derivation has permanent consequences for the spiritual dignity or charge of the name. The Bāb here and elsewhere depends upon such traditions throughout his commentary both here and in later works. See also the recently published book by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411), *al-Durr al-thamīn fi khamsmiʾat āyāt nazalat fī Amīr al-Muʾminīn*, edited by ʿAlī ʿĀshūr, Beirut, 1422/2003.

[96] *Baqara* 227. N.b. the allusion to the *Khuṭbat al-shiqshiqiyya*. The symbol of *qamīṣ* has an important place in the story of Joseph, and the Bāb's commentary on it, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

[97] *Baqara* 228. Notice the prominence of "Remembrance" (*dhikr*) here. The Bāb was later to assume the word as a title. See Lawson, The Terms, mentioned above.

[98] Cf. al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 124 #3 where in the *tafsīr* of Qummī, this verse is said to have come down about Abū Dharr and ʿUthmān. A very long report on this verse in which Abū Dharr and ʿUthmān figure prominently may be found in al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 80–3, #271. See also Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 27–8.

believer recognizes his (ʿAlī's) cause through these HABITATIONS (*fī khilāli tilka al-diyār*).[99]

Beginning at verse 90, a series of verses gives rise to comments in which the First, Second and Third are mentioned:

> EVIL IS THE THING THEY HAVE SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, DISBELIEVING IN THAT WHICH GOD SENT DOWN, GRUDGING THAT GOD SHOULD SEND DOWN OF HIS BOUNTY ON WHOMSOEVER HE WILL OF HIS SERVANTS, AND THEY WERE LADEN WITH ANGER UPON ANGER; AND FOR UNBELIEVERS AWAITS A HUMBLING CHASTISEMENT. [Q 2:90]
>
> Verily, those who desire the sign of the Inclusive Unity over the sign of the Exclusive Unity: EVIL IS THE THING THEY HAVE SOLD THEMSELVES FOR, namely, that sign of the Lord which is intended in the statement "He who knows it, knows God."[100] Namely, that THEIR polytheistic SOULS (*bi-anfusi-him al-mushrikati*) are the [collective] sign of the Infernal Caliphs (*khulafāʾ al-nār*). They call upon the armies of Satan[101] to disbelieve in WHAT GOD HAS SENT DOWN concerning the *walāya* of ʿAlī, GRUDGING stubbornly that which GOD SENDS DOWN OUT OF HIS BOUNTY, that is, his (ʿAlī's) *walāya*,[102] ON WHOMSOEVER HE WILL. And the Lord wills only to send it down upon the Family of God [who are] HIS SERVANTS. As for the other one, if they want his *walāya*, they will be LADEN WITH ANGER that is the Second, UPON ANGER, that is the Third, AND FOR those who swerved from the *walāya* of ʿAlī, THERE AWAITS A HUMBLING CHASTISEMENT. And that is the *walāya* of the First.[103]
>
> Abū Jaʿfar said: "Gabriel originally came down to the Messenger of God with this verse: 'Evil is the thing they have sold themselves for, that they disbelieve in what God has sent down concerning ʿAlī grudgingly."[104]

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[99] Or: "The believer in his *amr* recognizes them (the *qawāʿid*) within these habitations." *Baqara* 228.

[100] *Baqara* 232: *man ʿarafa-hā fa-qad ʿarafa Allāha*. The feminine pronoun may refer either to *āya* or *nafs*. In the latter case this statement is an allusion to the 'He who knows his self knows his Lord' tradition.

[101] *Wa hum yaḍʿūna junūda-l-shayṭān*; cf. Q 62:95.

[102] *Min faḍli-hi = walāyata-hi.*

[103] *Baqara* 232–3; *Baqara* crosses out a repeat of *ʿadhāb muhīn ilā*, 233.

[104] Also in al-Baḥrānī, *Kitāb al-burhān* 1, 169, #2 (= al-Ḥuwayzī, *Kitāb tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* 1, 86, #286, cf. also #282). The *isnād* in *Kitāb al-burhān*: Kulaynī, Qummī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Barqī, his father, Muḥammad ibn Sinān ʿAmmār ibn Marwān, al-Munkhal, Jābir, Bāqir. *al-Nūr al-abhā* gives the *isnād* as: *fī uṣūl al-kāfī bi-isnādi-hi ʿan Munkhal ʿan Jābir ʿan Abī Jaʿfar*. The variant #3 in *Kitāb al-burhān* relates the last half of the verse to the Umayyads. Cf. Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* 28, where there is no trace of this tradition in the appropriate place. The tradition, however, is also acknowledged in Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfī fī tafsīr kalām Allāh al-wāfī* 39.

[The Bāb:]

I testify that this is the intention (*al-maqṣūd*) of these verses according to the Merciful, and exalted is God above what the polytheists say.

Conclusion

Enough examples have now been examined to support the following conclusions.

(1) *Walāya* is one of the major themes of the commentary.
(2) The radical interpretation of Qurʾānic passages as speaking directly to the subject of *walāya* has its roots in traditional Shīʿī literature.
(3) The nature of the commentary on this theme exhibits certain features in common with the so-called *ghulāt*. In this regard the following summary from the *Kitāb al-irjāʾ*, written by the former leader of the *Mukhtāriyya*, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (99/717) is pertinent. Although the term *ghulāt* is not used, the group is condemned for holding the following views:
    1. The belief that religion meant allegiance to the house of ʿAlī, so that people ought to be loved or hated inasmuch as they were loyal or disloyal to that house. To this could be added the excommunication (*barāʾa*) of the opponents of ʿAlī among the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), especially the first three caliphs;
    2. The belief that the Prophet hid (*katama*) nine tenths of the Qurʾān and that they were guided to a new revelation (i.e., the claim that prophecy was possible after Muḥammad);
    3. The hope for a state that would be established in their favor in the future, in a general resurrection preceding the Day of Judgment.[105]

While the second item is never stated in these terms in the Bāb's *tafsīr*, the several references to the corruption of the Qurʾān, i.e., as when the Bāb quotes a tradition that says "Gabriel came down with this verse thus," would seem to offer a functional parallel. The last, number 3, figures in the eventual claims of the Bāb, but we have seen, particularly in the commentary on Q 2:51, that the establishment of the "sovereignty" (*salṭana*) of the Qāʾim is one of the themes of the commentary, as it is in so-called "orthodox"

[105] Quoted from al-Qāḍī, The Development of the Term 297.

Shīʿism. It has been argued, however, that the belief in the return of the hidden Imām was adopted as an "orthodox" doctrine by leading Shīʿī scholars in the Abbasid period, precisely because of the feeling that the interests of the Shīʿa as a whole had been betrayed[106] and as an emblem of non-Ismāʿīlī allegiance.

The Shaykhīs themselves were of course accused of *ghuluww* by their mostly Uṣūlī adversaries.[107] It is interesting to note here that Shaykh Aḥmad (d. 1241/1826) takes pains to disassociate his teaching on the subject of *walāya* from what the "hyperbolistes" (*ghulāt*) say.[108] That the Bāb himself was sensitive to such accusations may be seen in his citation of a *ḥadīth* from Bāqir, the fifth Imām, which runs as follows:

> O company of the Shīʿa! Be a middle position (*al-numruqat al-wusṭā*) so that the one who has gone beyond (*al-ghālī*) might return to you and the one who has lagged behind (*al-tālī*) might catch up with you.[109]

That such beliefs as those described above (and which inform much of Akhbārī Qurʾān commentary) were susceptible of being demonized as "extremist" is supported by the long section in the *Mirʾāt al-anwār* (a late Safavid glossary of Qurʾānic vocabulary in the key of Akhbārīsm) in which the charges of *tafwīḍ* and *ghuluww* (which might otherwise be leveled against the work) are discussed and explained.[110] Here the author says that those who occupy a "middle position" (*al-numruqat al-wusṭā*) are those who are able to appreciate the subtleties (*daqāʾiq*) of his doctrine of the Imāmate.[111] Appeal is made to the famous tradition in which the Prophet declared "The words of the family of Muḥammad are exceedingly abstruse (*ṣaʿb mustaṣʿab*). No one understands or believes them except those angels who have been brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*), a sent (or true) Prophet (*al-nabī al-mursal*), or a servant whose heart has been tested by God."[112] This idea of the knowledge of the Imāms being "exceedingly difficult" is found in a very long *ḥadīth* quoted by the Bāb in the course of his commentary on Q 2:27.[113] It is important to acknowledge these

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[106] al-Qāḍī, The Development of the Term 306.
[107] V. Rafatī, The Development of Shaykhī Thought 194–5 and 214.
[108] Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī, *Ziyāra* 188.
[109] *Baqara* 20.
[110] al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār* 59–69.
[111] al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī *Tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār* 60.
[112] al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār* 61. Cf. also the discussion of this *ḥadīth* in Crow, The Teaching of the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq 119–20 n. 86.
[113] *Baqara* 97.

so-called *ghuluww* aspects of the Bāb's *tafsīr*, in order to better understand the kinds of conditions in which he wrote, conditions which ultimately led to his own claim to *imāma.* It would appear that the Bāb is more involved in an internal Shīʿī debate, namely the one between the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, which by this time had become more of a *Shaykhī*/*Bālā-sarī* argument,[114] than a direct criticism of Sunnī Islam, though this would not be absent from the discourse.

More pertinent to this study however, are the methods by which the Bāb radicalized the meaning of the Qurʾān on the issue of *walāya*. These include the exegetical tools of allegory and typology. A recent discussion of typology as a method of reading scripture appears to have implications for this study.[115] Although the main subject in this work is the typological interpretation of the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the argument may be applied, with a few structural considerations, to general *Akhbārī* Shīʿī interpretation of the Qurʾān. At bottom, the argument in Shīʿī *tafsīr* is the vindication of the claim of the Shīʿa against the Sunnīs, whereas in the case of the Bible, a similar argument was put forth by the authors of the New Testament against the Jews. The point to be made however would appear to be applicable in both cases:

> Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously.[116]

We have seen for example, how the Bāb interpreted the events of the primordial Day of the Covenant, to support the central belief of orthodox Shīʿism, namely that ʿAlī's rightful position was usurped by Abū Bakr. In this and many other contexts, it might be argued that the Qurʾān fulfills the function of the Old Testament "as prophecy," while the *akhbār* of the

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[114] The term *Bālā-sarī*, "above the head," refers to the main body of the Shīʿa because of the common method of performing ritual visitation to the holy shrines. It denotes to the practice of standing at the head of the tomb, a practice that the Shaykhīs' condemned as being disrespectful. Shaykhī's became known, therefore, also as "*Pusht-i sarīs*" for their distinctive habit of standing at the foot of a sacred tomb, rather than circumambulating it, while reciting prayers. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam* 227.

[115] Frye, *The Great Code.*

[116] Frye, *The Great Code* 80–1.

Imāms represents the New Testament as "fulfillment." This analogy is of course not perfect because of the many important differences between the respective elements. Given however, the course which future Bābism was to take as a result of acknowledging the return of the Qā'im in the person of the Bāb, Frye's argument seems even more compelling:

> Typology points to future events that are often thought of as transcending time, so that they contain a vertical lift as well as a horizontal move forward. The metaphorical kernel of this is the experience of waking up from a dream . . . When we wake up from sleep, one world is simply abolished and replaced by another. This suggests a clue to the origin of typology: it is essentially a revolutionary form of thought and rhetoric. We have revolutionary thought whenever the feeling "life is a dream" becomes geared to an impulse to waken from it.[117]

The similarities between the themes described above in the Bāb's *tafsīr*, with those ascribed to the members of the *Mukhtāriyya* or *Kaysāniyya* would support Frye's insight. In addition, because the figure of the Qā'im is sometimes interpreted by the Bāb as an esoteric principle or reality, Frye's allusion to a "vertical" dimension of typological exegesis is also apposite.

With this survey of the use of the term *walāya* in the Bāb's commentary on the first *juz'* of the Qur'ān, it is possible to identify the Bāb's thinking on this subject only partly with the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim, which in turn may be thought to represent a kind of Akhbārī synthesis of several intellectual and spiritual tendencies.[118] But it is certainly not possible to say that the Bāb depended upon Shaykhī works for the main thrust of his argument, which would appear to be as old as Islam itself. It would be interesting to compare this view of *walāya* with that of Shaykh Aḥmad's older Persian contemporary, Nūr ʿAlī-Shāh, whose writings on the subject seems to be much less "Shīʿī" than the former's, although there are certain common features shared between the two.[119] Such a comparison would probably further explain Shaykh Aḥmad's great popularity in Iran.

The term *walī* may mean friend, helper, protector, superior or guardian; in basic legal theory it designates the primary heir. We see all of these

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[117] Frye, *The Great Code* 82–3.

[118] For the views of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī see his, *Ziyāra* 187–9; or his short handbook of doctrine *Kitāb ḥayāt al-nafs* 14–20. See also Rafati, The Development of Shaykhī Thought 191ff.

[119] M. de Miras, *La méthode spirituelle*, q.v. "lexique": *walāyat* & *walī*.

aspects of the word as it is applied by the Bāb to ʿAlī, and by extension, the other Imāms. The legal idea of primary heir is one of the more interesting in this regard, and may be seen reflected not only in statements made by the Bāb, but also in the *ḥadīth* literature itself. One of the more striking features of the above material is the delineating of False Walāya as a polar opposite of the True Walāya. As has been noted, this idea is not a creation of the Bāb and may be traced to the earliest *ḥadīth* collections and the Qurʾān itself (e.g., Q 4:76) where the world is divided into two major groups: those who do battle in the way of God, and those who do battle in the way or for the sake of Idols (*sabīl al-tāghūt*), the friends of Satan (*awliyāʾ al-Shayṭān*).[120]

The position of *walī* as a kind of "intercessor" for those too weak to act on their own behalf in matters of inheritance, and presumably other legal matters,[121] is one which is also reflected in those traditions quoted by the Bāb in which, for example, Paradise is the reward of those whose *walī* is ʿAlī.

Walāya was the central fact of meaning in the Bāb's universe, which was of course, a religious one. It is because of, or by means of *walāya*, that God communicates with creation, if not that principle because of which and by means of which creation is "creation." Throughout this *tafsīr* it is clear that it is this same *walāya* that circulates as spiritual energy through all the various hierarchies of being and existence uniting them and "enchanting" them. In this work it is also *walāya* that is central to divine self-manifestation—*tajallī* and that is also the central fact of the Shīʿī eschaton. Thus, it is without doubt the most important fact, idea and reality of the Bāb's universe. For Shīʿism, *walāya* provides a means for facing the otherwise imponderable problem: transcendence or immanence. In short the answer is "both." But it is not a "mere" metaphysical accomplishment. Recent historical events have shown us the profound and powerful place of *walāya/wilāya/vilāyat* in the Iranian soul. Khomeini rose to popularity as the leader of one of the most surprisingly successful revolutions in history on the appeal of a religious work entitled *Vilāyat al-faqīh*, a title which triggered many of the associations and historical-religious themes encountered above. Through the Bāb's prolonged contemplation of this most powerful of all spiritual realities it is as if he himself was

120 Landolt, Walāyah.
121 Cf. Landolt, Walāyah 318.

somehow conditioned by it and, thus conditioned, continued to the next stage of his remarkable life.

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List of Abbreviations

Baqara: Manuscript of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara.* Tehran Bahā'ī Archives, 6014.c.
C: Manuscript of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara.* Cambridge University Library, Browne Manuscript Collection, F10.
I: Privately published text of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* in *Majmūʿah-yi āthār haḍrat-i Aʿlā*, #69. Tehran, Badīʿ 133/1976, p.156–410.
L: Manuscript (partial) of *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*. Leiden University Library, Arabic manuscript Or.4791, #8.

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LA TRANSMIGRATION DES ÂMES. UNE NOTION PROBLÉMATIQUE DANS L'ISMAÉLISME D'ÉPOQUE FATIMIDE

Daniel De Smet

I. Introduction

Parmi les nombreuses « ignominies » (*faḍā'iḥ*) détectées dans la doctrine ismaélienne par ses adversaires, figure la croyance en la transmigration des âmes (*tanāsukh* ou *intiqāl al-arwāḥ*), une idée particulièrement scandaleuse pour tout musulman « bien-pensant »[1]. En effet, les polémistes les plus hostiles envers l'ismaélisme, comme par exemple Ibn Ḥazm (m. 456/1064) et al-Ghazālī (m. 505/1111), accusent les « Bāṭinites » de professer le *tanāsukh*, visiblement dans le but d'associer leur doctrine à celle des *ghulāt* (comme les Abū Muslimiyya), de certains muʿtazilites outrés (dont Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ et son disciple Aḥmad b. Yānūsh) et autres *falāsifa* admirateurs de Pythagore et de Platon, en particulier Abū Bakr al-Rāzī[2].

Or, il est bien connu que les témoignages de ces polémistes, qui font feu de tout bois pour noircir autant que possible la réputation des Ismaéliens, doivent être pris avec beaucoup de précaution. Dès lors, la question s'impose : l'ismaélisme de tradition carmathe et fatimide a-t-il réellement adhéré à une croyance en la transmigration des âmes, transgressant ainsi une des normes les plus fondamentales qui séparent l'orthodoxie islamique (y-compris l'orthodoxie chiite duodécimaine) de l' « hérésie »[3] ?

La réponse à cette question n'est pas simple, et cela pour quatre raisons principales.

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[1] Sur la « réprobation quasi universelle » de la transmigration des âmes en islam, voir Monnot, Transmigration 152–156.

[2] Ces tenants de la transmigration sont cités, côte-à-côte avec les « Carmathes parmi les Ismaéliens » par Ibn Ḥazm, *Fiṣal* i, 76–77; cf. Walker, Metempsychosis 231 n. 33. Selon al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'iḥ* 45–46, 49, la transmigration, telle qu'elle est enseignée par l'Imām infaillible des « Bāṭinites », ne fait que reprendre les thèses des philosophes matérialistes et athées.

[3] Pour une étude générale des différents courants « hérétiques » qui en Islam ont professé la transmigration sous l'une ou l'autre forme, voir Freitag, *Seelenwanderung*; Dietrich, Reinkarnation 129–149 (qui ne couvre pas le domaine ismaélien); Walker, Metempsychosis 219–238.

(1) La transmigration des âmes au sein d'une même espèce ou dans des corps appartenant à des espèces différentes – ce que l'on désigne généralement par le terme *maskh* (« métamorphose ») – deviendront des thèses centrales dans l'ismaélisme ṭayyibite qui s'est développé au Yémen dès le milieu du XI[e] siècle[4]. Toutefois, la relation entre le Ṭayyibisme et les mouvements ismaéliens antérieurs demeure obscure. Dans l'état actuel de la recherche, il n'est pas clair si les Ṭayyibites ont introduit dans leur système des doctrines empruntées à d'autres traditions, en particulier à la littérature des *ghulāt*, ou si, en revanche, ils n'ont fait qu'élaborer des thèmes déjà présents dans l'ismaélisme carmathe et fatimide. Ainsi, une des sources majeures des spéculations ṭayyibites sur la métempsycose et la métamorphose semble être la *Risāla al-Jāmiʿa* attribuée aux Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, que les Ṭayyibites citent abondamment[5]. Mais le rapport de cet ouvrage avec les *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* et l'ismaélisme pré-ṭayyibite reste à établir. Ayant déjà abordé ces questions ailleurs[6], je ne tenterai pas d'y répondre dans la présente étude. Je plaiderais néanmoins en faveur d'une certaine continuité dans la doctrine ismaélienne, malgré toutes les divergences d'un courant et d'un auteur à l'autre. En témoigne, pour le sujet qui nous occupe ici, l'apparition du terme *masūkhiyya* – dans le cadre d'une exégèse de Q 2:6–7 – en un des plus anciens textes carmathes qui nous sont parvenus : le traité I du *Kitāb al-kashf* attribué à Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (m. vers 346/957)[7].

(2) Certains Ismaéliens ont été accusés de professer la transmigration des âmes, non seulement par des polémistes avides de leur attribuer toutes les hérésies imaginables, mais également par des auteurs plus avertis. Parmi ceux-ci figure al-Bīrūnī (m. 442/1050), un savant bien informé et relativement objectif. Après avoir exposé dans son *Taḥqīq mā lil-Hind* différentes théories hindoues sur la transmigration, il enchaîne avec ce passage devenu célèbre dans les études ismaéliennes :

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[4] Voir Freitag, *Seelenwanderung* 161–182. Par *maskh* ou *masūkhiyya* on entend la transmigration d'âmes humaines dans des corps d'animaux, de végétaux ou de minéraux, afin d'y expier leurs fautes; voir De Smet, Métamorphose 552–554. Dans la suite de l'article, j'utiliserai le terme « métempsycose » pour désigner la transmigration des âmes au sein de l'espèce humaine, tandis que « métamorphose » se réfère au *maskh*.

[5] Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 143 n. 32, 37.

[6] De Smet, Scarabées 39–54; Id., Éléments chrétiens 45–53.

[7] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (attribué à), *Kashf* 4–5 : les incrédules, à savoir les Ismaéliens renégats, « deviennent comme des animaux »; le « terrible châtiment » évoqué par le verset coranique, n'est autre que la *masūkhiyya*; cf. Halm, *Kosmologie* 165.

> Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijzī [...], dans un de ses livres intitulé *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, a soutenu la thèse que les espèces sont conservées et que la transmigration (*tanāsukh*) s'opère en chacune d'elles, sans s'étendre vers une autre espèce. Cela était également l'opinion des Grecs. Jean Philopon rapporte au sujet de Platon qu'il estimait que les âmes rationnelles passent dans les habits des corps d'animaux (*libās ajsād al-bahā'im*) et qu'il suivait en cela les inepties (*khurāfāt*) de Pythagore[8].

À en croire al-Bīrūnī, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (m. après 361/971), un des penseurs ismaéliens les plus marquants de la seconde moitié du X^e^ siècle, aurait accepté la transmigration des âmes au sein d'une même espèce – en d'autres termes : le passage de l'âme humaine d'un corps humain à l'autre – contrairement à Pythagore et à Platon qui soutenaient qu'une âme humaine peut également se réincarner dans le corps d'un animal.

Une accusation analogue, mais formulée en des termes beaucoup plus voilés, a été portée contre le même Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī par le philosophe et théologien ismaélien Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (m. après 411/1020) dans son *Kitāb al-riyāḍ*, qui est une réfutation du *Kitāb al-nuṣra* d'al-Sijistānī, perdu par ailleurs. La polémique concerne, entre autres, l'origine et la nature de l'âme humaine.

Afin de faciliter la compréhension de ce qui va suivre, il est utile de rappeler en quelques mots les conceptions, à première vue diamétralement opposées, que ces deux *duʿāt* ismaéliens avaient au sujet de l'âme humaine.

Selon al-Sijistānī, qui s'est largement inspiré des écrits néoplatoniciens arabes, l'âme humaine est une parcelle (*juz'*) de l'Âme universelle. Suite à sa position intermédiaire entre l'Intellect et la Nature, et à son imperfection par rapport à l'Intellect, l'Âme est, d'une part, mue par son désir vers l'Intellect, afin d'acquérir de lui les perfections qui lui manquent. Mais, d'autre part, elle s'incline vers la Nature en se fragmentant en une multitude d'âmes particulières liées à des corps matériels. À cause de cette descente dans les ténèbres d'ici-bas, les âmes particulières ont oublié l'éclat et les lumières du monde intelligible dont elles sont issues. En acceptant la science enseignée par les Imāms, l'âme peut se ressouvenir de sa patrie et

[8] al-Bīrūnī, *Taḥqīq mā lil-Hind* 32; cf. Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 131; Walker, Metempsychosis 230; De Smet, Nāṣir 126. Dans la suite du texte, al-Bīrūnī donne un collage de citations sur la transmigration tirées du *Phédon* de Platon; voir De Smet, Héritage de Platon 102–103.

entamer le chemin du retour. Elle voyage ainsi entre le monde intelligible et le monde sensible, en se servant d'un « véhicule » (*markab*) corporel[9].

Pour al-Kirmānī, cette doctrine est inacceptable car, selon lui, l'Âme universelle est nécessairement parfaite en tant qu'hypostase du monde intelligible, tandis que l'âme humaine n'est pas descendue dans le corps en oubliant ce qu'elle a connu là-haut. Al-Kirmānī opte, en revanche, pour la théorie de l'âme des *falāsifa*, en particulier celle d'al-Fārābī. L'âme humaine n'est pas préexistante au corps, mais elle est générée en même temps que lui. Initialement, elle s'y trouve en un état de puissance – l'intellect matériel ou la première perfection – et elle doit s'actualiser progressivement sous l'influence de l'Intellect agent qui, dans l'optique ismaélienne d'al-Kirmānī, s'incorpore ici-bas dans les personnes des prophètes et des Imāms. L'âme devient un intellect en acte et atteint sa seconde perfection lorsqu'elle a pleinement reçu leur enseignement[10].

Revenons maintenant au *Kitāb al-riyāḍ*. Al-Kirmānī y donne quelques citations du *Kitāb al-nuṣra* qui se rapportent à la nature de l'âme humaine : sa descente dans le corps en tant que parcelle (*juz'*) de l'Âme universelle, son oubli et son anamnèse[11]. Al-Kirmānī réfute aussitôt ces thèses d'al-Sijistānī, à cause bien sûr de son orientation philosophique différente, mais également, de façon implicite, parce qu'il craint qu'elles impliquent la métempsycose. Bien que les fragments du *Kitāb al-nuṣra* cités dans le *Kitāb al-riyāḍ* ne contiennent aucune allusion directe à la transmigration des âmes, al-Kirmānī termine sa réfutation par la remarque suivante :

> Ce que l'auteur du *Nuṣra* a exposé dans l'*Iqlīd* 44 de son livre intitulé *al-Maqālīd* au sujet de l'impossibilité du fait que ces âmes arrivent à partir du monde de l'Intellect, suffit comme preuve de la réfutation de ce qu'il a dit dans son *Nuṣra* et de la pertinence de ce que nous avons exposé. J'ignore comment il a pu soutenir une telle chose. De toute évidence, il a écrit le *Kitāb al-maqālīd* après le *Kitāb al-nuṣra*[12].

Or, le 44e chapitre du *Kitāb al-maqālīd*, que nous analyserons plus loin, est entièrement consacré à une réfutation du *tanāsukh*. Dès lors, al-Kirmānī semble suggérer que son prédécesseur al-Sijistānī avait d'abord élaboré une théorie de l'âme humaine impliquant la transmigration et que, plus

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[9] Voir, pour plus de détails et des références aux textes d'al-Sijistānī, Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism* 95–101; De Smet, Nāṣir 109–125; Id., Religiöse Anwendung 527–529.

[10] De Smet, *Quiétude* 350–377; Id., Perfectio prima 263–269; Id., al-Fārābī's influence 146–149.

[11] al-Kirmānī, *Riyāḍ* 87–92.

[12] al-Kirmānī, *Riyāḍ* 93; cf. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism* 99, 137.

tard, il avait lui-même réfuté cette thèse. Mais, al-Sijistānī est-il vraiment revenu sur sa position initiale ? Se serait-il rétracté suite aux accusations d'hérésie portées contre lui par ses collègues ismaéliens[13] ?

Enfin, quelques décennies après al-Kirmānī, le *dāʿī* ismaélien Nāṣir-i Khusraw (m. après 462/1070) reprend les mêmes accusations contre al-Sijistānī. Après avoir décrit dans le chapitre sur le *tanāsukh* de son *Zād al-musāfirīn* différentes théories relatives à la transmigration, il remarque qu'une doctrine analogue a été défendue par al-Sijistānī – « à une époque où il souffrait de mélancolie » – en plusieurs de ses ouvrages, notamment *Sūs al-baqāʾ* (qui semble perdu), *Kashf al-maḥjūb* et *al-Risāla al-bāhira*, mais qu'il reçut pour cela une sérieuse réprimande du « Maître de son époque » (*khudāwand-i zamān*, probablement l'Imām fatimide)[14]. Nāṣir formule une accusation similaire dans son *Khwān al-Ikhwān*[15]. Toutefois, ces critiques n'empêchent Nāṣir-i Khusraw d'emprunter à al-Sijistānī sa conception de l'âme humaine, tout en ignorant celle élaborée par al-Kirmānī[16].

(3) Il ressort de ce qui précède que la question de la transmigration des âmes était matière à débat au sein de la *daʿwa* ismaélienne tout au long des X^e^ et XI^e^ siècles. La plupart des ouvrages doctrinaux de cette époque, y-compris ceux d'al-Sijistānī, contiennent en effet des réfutations explicites du *tanāsukh* et de l'*intiqāl al-arwāḥ*. Dès lors, une analyse de leurs arguments s'impose. En me limitant ici aux écrits d'al-Sijistānī et d'al-Kirmānī, j'essaierai de cerner ce que ces auteurs entendent exactement par ces termes et quelles doctrines étaient inacceptables pour eux, car jugées contraires à l'enseignement des Imāms. Notre analyse montrera que les deux *duʿāt*, bien que défendant respectivement une conception néoplatonicienne et aristotélisante de l'âme humaine, sont plus ou moins sur une même longueur d'ondes lorsqu'ils réfutent le *tanāsukh*.

(4) Mais ce rejet du *tanāsukh* implique-t-il nécessairement qu'al-Sijistānī et al-Kirmānī refusent toute forme de métempsycose ? Tout en adhérant à des théories philosophiques différentes pour expliquer l'origine et la nature de l'âme humaine, ils partagent au sujet de son salut

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[13] Telle est l'opinion de Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 139–140, suivi par Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism* 20–21 : une fois rallié à la cause fatimide, al-Sijistānī – qui appartenait originairement au camp carmathe – a désavoué la doctrine de la transmigration qui était inadmissible pour l'orthodoxie fatimide.

[14] Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād* 421–422.

[15] Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Khwān* 130–139. Pour une présentation plus détaillée, voir De Smet, Nāṣir 127–130; Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 131–134.

[16] De Smet, Nāṣir 104–130.

des opinions similaires, car inhérentes à la doctrine ismaélienne. Ainsi, pour les deux auteurs, la béatitude est purement spirituelle et s'obtient au moment où l'âme, pleinement purifiée ou actualisée par le *ʿilm al-bāṭin* enseigné par les Imāms, peut se libérer de ses attaches corporelles. Or, cette gnose salvatrice ne sera révélée en son intégralité que lors de la « Grande Résurrection » (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*), avec l'avènement du Qā'im, le « septième Nāṭiq » ou « Seigneur du septième cycle », qui marque l'ouverture du « cycle de manifestation » (*dawr al-kashf*). En attendant l'apparition du Qā'im, aucune âme ne peut accéder à la béatitude éternelle, ce qui signifie qu'aucune âme ne peut se passer de substrat corporel. Comment alors concevoir celui-ci ?

Cette question nous amènera à nous pencher, dans la dernière partie de cet article, sur l'eschatologie et, en particulier, sur la distinction que nos deux auteurs établissent entre les notions coraniques de *baʿth* et *qiyāma*. Il s'agit là d'une matière particulièrement difficile, car pour tout ce qui touche à l'eschatologie, al-Sijistānī et al-Kirmānī adoptent une « écriture ésotérique » dans le sens décrit par Leo Strauss[17]. Cela signifie que les doctrines ne sont pas exposées de façon méthodique, comme c'est souvent le cas pour d'autres aspects de l'enseignement ismaélien, mais qu'elles sont voilées derrière une phraséologie islamique traditionnelle et une profusion de citations coraniques ou de *ḥadīth*, de sorte qu'un lecteur superficiel croit avoir entre les mains un ouvrage (relativement) orthodoxe. Par endroits, des brins de la doctrine sous-jacente sont introduits, mais toujours formulés d'une façon volontairement obscure.

II. Les arguments ismaéliens contre la métempsycose

1. *Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī*

a. Kitāb al-maqālīd

Le 44e *Iqlīd* du *Kitāb al-maqālīd* d'al-Sijistānī porte comme titre : « que la transmigration des âmes est vaine » (*fī anna l-tanāsukh bāṭil*)[18]. Nous avons vu qu'au dire d'al-Kirmānī, l'auteur y aurait réfuté des « erreurs » qu'il avait défendues lui-même à une époque antérieure. Or, une analyse du chapitre montre que les thèses incriminées ne sont approuvées dans aucun des ouvrages d'al-Sijistānī parvenus jusqu'à nous.

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[17] Strauss, *Persécution*, en particulier 51–69.

[18] al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 200–204; cf. Walker, Metempsychosis 232–235.

L'auteur commence par résumer la doctrine des « partisans de la transmigration » (*aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh*), sans toutefois révéler leur identité. Ils divaguent, selon lui, lorsqu'ils estiment que les âmes sont descendues (*habaṭat*) en ce monde suite à une faute (*zalla*) qui leur est antérieure et qu'elles transmigrent d'un corps à l'autre afin d'expier cette faute. Ils admettent de surcroît que les âmes transmigrent dans des corps d'animaux, en fonction de l'ampleur de leurs péchés. Les âmes ne peuvent entamer le chemin du retour vers le monde céleste qu'après s'être entièrement purifiées des souillures causées par cette faute primordiale[19].

Leur thèse de type « gnostique » s'avère contraire à la philosophie néoplatonicienne d'al-Sijistānī, pour qui la descente des âmes dans les corps n'est pas due à une « faute » quelconque, puisqu'elle découle nécessairement de l'imperfection de l'Âme universelle qui s'incline vers la Nature. Par ailleurs, selon le témoignage d'al-Bīrūnī[20], la forme de transmigration professée par al-Sijistānī s'opère toujours au sein d'une même espèce, excluant ainsi le passage des âmes humaines dans des corps animaux.

En effet, la réfutation des « partisans du *tanāsukh* » tourne entièrement autour de cette notion de « faute » et l'impossibilité d'une réincarnation dans les animaux. Si les âmes sont descendues à cause d'une faute qui leur est antérieure, elles devraient être soit descendues toutes ensemble, soit l'une après l'autre. La première possibilité est absurde : il faudrait alors qu'apparaisse d'un seul coup un nombre égal de corps pour les accueillir. Or, les corps sont générés par procréation à partir d'un seul principe et leur nombre ne s'accroît qu'au cours du temps. Il faut donc que les âmes soient descendues les unes après les autres, en fonction de la génération des corps par procréation. Si on accepte cette dernière possibilité, des problèmes multiples surgissent, notamment pour ce qui concerne l'âme des prophètes. Si toutes les âmes sont unies à des corps à cause d'une faute antérieure, les âmes des prophètes ne peuvent échapper à cette règle, ce qui est manifestement contraire à leur infaillibilité. Dieu aurait-Il envoyé à ses créatures des émissaires dont l'âme est « malade » et qui auraient davantage intérêt à se guérir eux-mêmes qu'à guérir leur communauté ?

Quant à cette « faute antérieure », il s'agit soit d'une faute unique, soit d'une pluralité de fautes distinctes. Mais comment concevoir une multiplicité de fautes dans le monde intelligible, alors que celui-ci est caractérisé par une simplicité absolue, étant dépourvu de toute forme de pluralité ?

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19 al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 200.

20 Voir *supra*, p. 79.

Quel serait alors le principe par lequel ces fautes se distinguent les unes des autres ? En admettant qu'il n'y ait eu qu'une faute unique, pourquoi les âmes descendent-elles dans des corps d'espèces différentes ou ayant des dispositions naturelles distinctes ?

Par ailleurs, comment ces corps ont-ils été créés ? Est-ce les âmes qui, au moment de leur descente, génèrent des corps auxquels elles s'unissent ? Leur faute leur aurait alors conféré une puissance créatrice qui ne revient qu'à Dieu. Si, en revanche, c'est Dieu qui crée ces corps pour accueillir les âmes coupables d'une faute, Il ne leur inflige point de punition, mais leur offre au contraire une récompense. En effet : « c'est par les corps que se manifeste la noblesse des âmes »[21].

Ce dernier argument reflète un thème central de la pensée d'al-Sijistānī : le corps est un instrument indispensable au salut de l'âme[22]. La création toute entière est empreinte d'une beauté et d'une harmonie qui interdisent de concevoir les corps comme des lieux de châtiment. Dès lors, al-Sijistānī rejette comme une absurdité la possibilité que des âmes humaines puissent transmigrer dans des corps d'animaux afin d'y être torturées. Car les animaux sont bien plus heureux que les hommes : ils jouissent beaucoup plus que nous de la nourriture, des boissons et de la copulation, n'étant point soumis aux tourments de la pensée[23]. D'ailleurs, comme doit le prouver une série de versets coraniques cités à l'appui, Dieu a créé les animaux pour le bien-être de l'homme, non pour servir de lieu de châtiment à son âme[24].

Le chapitre se termine par le *ta'wīl* de trois versets coraniques dans lesquels les *aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh* trouvent une confirmation de leur doctrine. Il s'agit tout d'abord de Q 6:38 : « Il n'y a pas de bêtes sur la terre, il n'y a pas d'oiseaux volant de leurs ailes qui ne forment, comme vous, des communautés ». Pour al-Sijistānī, ce verset prouve, au contraire, la fausseté du *tanāsukh*. Voici son exégèse :

> Toutefois, le Créateur savait que certains esprits allaient professer une telle opinion fausse [*i.e.* le *tanāsukh*]. Aussi a-t-Il rapporté en ce verset que chaque espèce d'animaux forme par rapport à son genre des communautés comme la nôtre, sans que pour autant il y ait des âmes qui transmigrent d'une espèce à l'autre[25].

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21 al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 202.
22 De Smet, Les deux faces de l'âme 81–89.
23 al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 200.
24 al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 202–203, cite Q 16:5–7, 8, 80; 23:21–22; 41:44.
25 al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 203.

Les deux autres versets concernent la métamorphose (*maskh*) : « Dieu a transformé en singes et en porcs ceux qu'Il a maudits » (Q 5:60) et « Nous leur avons dit : Soyez des singes abjects » (Q 2:65 ou 7:166). Selon al-Sijistānī, ces versets doivent être compris en un sens métaphorique :

> Lorsque les hommes s'abstiennent d'obéir aux Amis (*awliyā', i.e.* les prophètes et les Imāms), de suivre leur voie et de se comporter selon leur éthique, Dieu change leur comportement, de sorte qu'ils entrent dans la disposition naturelle des porcs, en s'éloignant des mœurs humaines. Quant à la transformation des corps de la forme humaine en la forme du singe et du porc, c'est une chose dont l'impossibilité se fait valoir sous tous les angles et dont la possibilité n'est d'aucune façon envisageable. Par conséquent, il est avéré que le *tanāsukh* est une [doctrine] vaine"[26].

Au terme de cette analyse du 44e *Iqlīd*, nous commençons à entrevoir ce qu'al-Sijistānī entend exactement par *tanāsukh* : la transmigration des âmes d'une espèce à l'autre, d'un corps humain vers un corps animal, afin d'expier une faute commise avant leur descente en ce bas-monde. Ce chapitre n'a rien d'une rétractation, puisque dans aucun de ses ouvrages conservés, al-Sijistānī ne soutient une telle doctrine. Celle-ci s'avère contraire à sa conception de l'origine et de la nature de l'âme humaine, ainsi qu'à la valeur qu'il accorde au corps comme instrument nécessaire au salut de l'âme. Enfin, l'absence du moindre argument contre le passage de l'âme humaine d'un corps humain à l'autre, étonne dans un chapitre qui se propose de réfuter la transmigration.

b. *Kashf al-maḥjūb*

Une image identique ressort de cet ouvrage dans lequel – au dire d'al-Bīrūnī et de Nāṣir-i Khusraw[27] – al-Sijistānī aurait soutenu la métempsycose.

Après avoir rappelé que l'Âme universelle est descendue en la forme humaine suite à sa position intermédiaire entre l'Intellect et la Nature[28], sans que n'intervienne une « faute » quelconque, al-Sijistānī consacre une large part du chapitre 5 à démontrer la conservation des espèces naturelles. Cela implique notamment que les espèces ne peuvent se mélanger entre elles. Un tel mélange est impossible vu que les espèces sont toujours liées à des individus. Le mélange des espèces entraînerait le mélange des individus, ce qui engendrerait des individus hybrides – de type mi-homme mi-âne ou mi-oiseau mi-âne – dont l'existence est impossible. Par ailleurs,

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[26] al-Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 204.
[27] Voir *supra*, p. 79, 81.
[28] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 27–28; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 61; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 97.

puisque chaque être passe de la puissance à l'acte et devient en acte ce qu'il était en puissance, il est absurde que la semence de l'âne, qui est un âne en puissance, devienne un cheval[29].

Or, selon al-Sijistānī, de telles absurdités ont été soutenues par certains « ignorants » au sujet du sort de l'âme après sa séparation d'avec le corps. Ces « ignorants » – qui une fois de plus ne sont pas identifiés – professent le *tanāsukh*, une doctrine qui admet que l'âme humaine passe dans le corps d'un chien ou d'un âne et, inversement, que l'âme d'un chien ou d'un âne transmigre dans le corps d'un homme. Cela est impossible puisque la forme du chien est déjà présente en puissance dans la semence du chien. Lorsque celle-ci s'actualise en prenant graduellement la forme d'un chien en acte, le corps en formation est disposé à recevoir une âme conforme à son espèce, en occurrence une âme animale : l'âme d'un chien. Comment l'âme d'un homme pourrait-elle entrer dans le corps d'un chien ? Cette thèse est non seulement impossible, mais elle est dénuée de sens. En effet, ses partisans affirment que Dieu châtie ainsi les âmes des méchants dans des corps d'animaux. Mais à l'intérieur de l'espèce humaine, innombrables sont les corps qui sont bien plus impurs et plus abjects que ceux des chiens, des loups et des porcs ! Il n'y a donc aucune raison de prôner la transmigration d'une espèce à l'autre en guise de châtiment[30].

Comme dans le *Kitāb al-maqālīd*, le terme *tanāsukh* se réfère exclusivement à la transmigration des âmes d'une espèce à l'autre, en particulier d'un corps humain à un corps animal. Ici encore, la réfutation de cette doctrine ne contient aucun argument contre la métempsycose.

2. *Ḥamza b. ʿAlī et les* Épîtres *druzes*

Le *dāʿī* ismaélien dissident Ḥamza b. ʿAlī, dont les écrits sont à la base du druzisme, développa quelques décennies après la mort d'al-Sijistānī un système religieux à partir d'éléments empruntés à l'ismaélisme carmathe et à la tradition des *ghulāt*[31]. Cela n'empêche qu'il rejette le *tanāsukh* avec la même véhémence qu'al-Sijistānī, en prenant à son tour le terme dans le sens de métamorphose (*maskh*).

Sa réfutation du *tanāsukh* se trouve dans la *Risāla al-dāmigha*, le 15e traité des *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma* dirigé contre les Nuṣayris. Ḥamza les accuse de

[29] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 59–60; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 93; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 109.
[30] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 60; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 94; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 109–110.
[31] De Smet, *Épîtres* 73–75.

croire au *tanāsukh*, c'est-à-dire à la réincarnation des âmes impies en des corps d'animaux, de végétaux et de minéraux :

> Il [*i.e.* le Nuṣayrī] dit que les âmes des ennemis de ʿAlī et des adversaires retournent en des chiens, des singes et des porcs, pour finalement entrer dans du fer et y être chauffées et frappées sous le marteau. Il ajoute que d'autres entrent en des oiseaux et des hiboux, et que d'autres encore reviennent dans le corps d'une femme ayant perdu ses enfants[32].

Selon Ḥamza, cette doctrine est fausse, car contraire à la raison, ainsi qu'à la justice et à la sagesse divines. En effet, les âmes des animaux, des végétaux et des minéraux étant dénuées de faculté rationnelle, elles ne peuvent saisir le sens de la punition qui leur est infligée. Cela n'est pas en accord avec la sagesse divine :

> Au contraire, la sagesse consiste à punir un homme qui comprend et connaît le sens du châtiment, afin qu'il y trouve une leçon et une cause de repentir. Aussi, la punition qui convient à un homme consiste-t-elle à le faire passer d'un rang élevé à un rang inférieur dans la religion, de diminuer ses moyens de subsistance, d'aveugler son cœur pour les choses religieuses et temporelles, et de le faire passer ainsi, selon cette voie descendante, d'une enveloppe charnelle (*qamīṣ*) à une autre[33].

Ce passage est une des rares allusions explicites à la métempsycose dans les écrits de Ḥamza. Tout en rejetant le *tanāsukh* auquel il donne le sens de métamorphose et qu'il attribue aux Nuṣayris, il semble admettre la transmigration des âmes humaines d'un corps humain à l'autre. La tradition druze ultérieure désignera cette forme de métempsycose par le terme de *taqammuṣ*, visiblement dans le but de la distinguer du *tanāsukh* et du *maskh*[34].

3. *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*

Célèbre *dāʿī* opérant sous le règne d'al-Ḥākim, al-Kirmānī est généralement considéré comme un des représentants majeurs de l'orthodoxie fatimide, telle qu'elle fut promulguée par les Imāms-califes du Caire. Toutefois, sa réfutation de la transmigration n'est pas dirigée contre des auteurs ou des courants ismaéliens situés en marge de cette orthodoxie; elle vise, au contraire, des *ghulāt* et des philosophes qui n'ont aucun lien direct avec

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[32] Ḥamza b. ʿAlī, *al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, in De Smet, *Épîtres* 313, 609.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] De Smet, *Épîtres* 66–67. Sur la doctrine nuṣayrie de la transmigration, voir Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs* 102–110; Bar-Asher et Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* 62–66, 160–161.

l'ismaélisme. Cette critique est développée en deux ouvrages de polémique : le *Tanbīh al-hādī wa-l-mustahdī* et les *Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*, qui reprennent le même type d'arguments contre la transmigration des âmes. En outre, ces arguments présentent des similitudes avec ceux invoqués par al-Sijistānī et par Ḥamza b. ʿAlī, notamment pour ce qui concerne le rejet catégorique du *maskh*, mais ils s'en distinguent par le fait qu'al-Kirmānī condamne explicitement toute forme de transmigration, y-compris au sein de l'espèce humaine.

a. *Tanbīh al-hādī wa-l-mustahdī*

Cet ouvrage de polémique dirigé contre tous les courants en islam qui refusent l'enseignement (*taʿlīm*) des Imāms ismaéliens, contient un chapitre exposant l' « errance » (*ḍalāl*) des *ghulāt*, en particulier des Nuṣayriyya et des Isḥāqiyya[35]. Certaines des thèses incriminées se rapportent à la transmigration des âmes, bien qu'al-Kirmānī n'emploie jamais le terme *tanāsukh* en ce chapitre.

Selon une des thèses défendues par les *ghulāt*, Dieu a fait descendre les âmes en ce bas-monde pour les punir, après qu'elles aient refusé d'attester (*iqrār*) sa magnificence. Il leur imposa ainsi de transmigrer d'un corps à l'autre jusqu'au moment où, purifiées, elles seront en mesure d'entamer le chemin du retour. Al-Kirmānī remarque qu'une telle purification par la transmigration (*intiqāl*) implique qu'en passant d'un corps à l'autre, l'âme acquière progressivement les vertus qui lui manquent. Or, cette acquisition de la vertu nécessite le respect de la charia et l'acceptation du sens littéral (*ẓāhir*) de la révélation – ce qu'al-Kirmānī appelle le « culte par la pratique » (*al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*)[36] – alors que les *ghulāt* rejettent précisément le *ẓāhir* pour n'en garder que le sens caché (*bāṭin*). Par conséquent, dans leur cas spécifique, la transmigration ne pourrait purifier l'âme mais ne ferait que la souiller et la torturer toujours davantage[37]. Notons que cet argument ne rejette pas explicitement la possibilité de l'*intiqāl*.

Tout comme al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī refuse l'idée que les âmes sont descendues ici-bas à cause d'une faute antérieure, en occurrence le refus d'attester la magnificence de Dieu. Pour al-Kirmānī, cette doctrine est

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[35] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 205–224; cf. Walker, Metempsychosis 236–237. Ce texte étant inédit, j'ai utilisé le ms. 723 de l'*Institute of Ismaili Studies* de Londres, daté de Rajab 1354/1935; cf. Gacek, *Catalogue* 125. Les Isḥāqiyya, secte souvent associée aux Nuṣayris par les hérésiographes, sont les disciples d'Isḥāq al-Aḥmar (m. 286/899); voir Halm, *Islamische Gnosis* 278–282 ; Asatryan, Esḥāq Aḥmar Naḵaʿi, *EIr*.

[36] De Smet, *Quiétude* 354, 361.

[37] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 212–213.

contraire à la miséricorde et à la toute-puissance divines : en sa miséricorde, Il aurait dû les pardonner au lieu de les châtier; en sa toute-puissance, Il aurait pu les punir là-haut au lieu de les envoyer ici-bas pour recevoir leur châtiment.

À cet argument plutôt faible fait suite la phrase suivante :

> Parmi leurs ignominies figure leur thèse que Dieu a pris les âmes comme des […] et les a invitées à l'attester (*al-iqrār bihi*). Celle qui, parmi elles, l'attesta, resta en ce monde de façon permanente; celle qui ne l'attesta pas, fut châtiée par la descente[38].

Le mot mis ici entre crochets n'apparaît pas clairement dans le manuscrit, sans doute à cause de l'hésitation du copiste qui n'en comprenait pas le sens. Il a été rayé et remplacé dans la marge par *ka-l-dharr* (« comme des atomes » ?). Je me demande s'il ne faut pas plutôt lire *ka-l-durr* (« comme des perles »), faisant référence à l'image gnostique de l'âme comme une perle radieuse[39]. Le trouble du copiste s'expliquerait alors par le fait que l'auteur lui-même ne semble pas avoir saisi le sens de cette image. Il comprend en effet le mot en question comme signifiant « des enfants » et le remplace plus loin par *al-dhurriyyāt* : « Dieu n'a pas besoin de prendre des enfants (*dhurriyyāt*) et de leur imposer de l'attester »[40]. Il est ainsi amené à développer une longue réfutation de cette doctrine gnostique mal comprise avec des arguments purement juridiques ! Si les âmes avant leur chute étaient des « enfants », il serait absurde que Dieu leur ordonne de l'attester, puisque selon la charia un enfant en bas âge n'est pas obligé de suivre les préceptes de la loi et n'est pas juridiquement responsable. Il ne peut donc être puni pour avoir transgressé les commandements de Dieu[41].

Al-Kirmānī partage donc avec al-Sijistānī le rejet d'une faute primordiale qui aurait causé la descente des âmes et leur lien avec les corps. Cependant, il se sépare de son prédécesseur en refusant – tout comme l'avait fait al-Fārābī[42] – la préexistence des âmes et leur descente en ce monde.

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[38] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 213.

[39] Goldziher, Neuplatonische 329; cf. Bar-Asher et Kofsky, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* 75.

[40] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 214.

[41] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 213–214.

[42] al-Fārābī, *ʿUyūn* 64 : « il n'est pas possible que l'âme existe avant le corps, comme dit Platon, et il n'est pas possible que l'âme transmigre (*intiqāl*) d'un corps à l'autre, comme disent les tenants du *tanāsukh* »; cf. Monnot, Transmigration 285. Si l'attribution de cet ouvrage à al-Fārābī n'est pas sûre, il reflète néanmoins sa pensée.

Son argument part de la prémisse que « l'âme est ignorante au début de son existence comme un enfant (*ṭifl*) ». Or, cette ignorance est soit par essence, soit par accident. Dans le premier cas, l'âme ne peut s'instruire et se purifier par la science en descendant en ce bas monde, puisque ce qui est en elle par essence – à savoir l'ignorance – ne peut cesser d'exister. Dans le second cas, l'âme ne peut avoir été ignorante avant sa descente, puisque dans le monde intelligible il n'y a pas d'accidents, ces derniers ne faisant leur apparition que dans le monde de la génération et de la corruption. Par conséquent, la préexistence des âmes par rapport aux corps est vaine, tout comme le fait qu'elles seraient arrivées (*warada*) dans les corps[43].

Il est clair que cet argument ne réfute pas vraiment la thèse de la préexistence des âmes, mais plutôt celle de la préexistence d'âmes ignorantes descendues ici-bas pour s'instruire. Mais, visiblement, il ne sert que d'étape intermédiaire pour arriver à la réfutation de la transmigration (*intiqāl*) : « ils croient que les âmes transmigrent dans les corps après s'être séparées de leurs corps et qu'elles y retournent afin d'être torturées ou purifiées »[44].

La réfutation d'al-Kirmānī est subtile. Il commence par citer le verset Q 56:61 : « Nous vous ferons renaître dans un état que vous ignorez », et en déduit que la science que les tenants de la transmigration prétendent avoir à ce sujet ne vient ni de Dieu, ni des prophètes, ni des Imāms, ce qui implique qu'elle est nécessairement vaine. Implicitement, il reconnaît que le verset se réfère à une « renaissance » (*baʿth*) qui n'est pas la *qiyāma* et dont l'Imām infaillible connaît le sens réel[45]. Sans que ce sens ne nous soit dévoilé, l'auteur suggère l'existence d'un rapport entre la « seconde naissance » (*al-nashʿa al-thāniyya*) invoquée par le verset coranique et les vaines spéculations des *ghulāt* sur la transmigration (*intiqāl*). Ou plutôt : la « renaissance » n'a pas lieu sous la forme d'une transmigration des âmes telle que les *ghulāt* se la représentent.

En effet, le transport (*naql*) des âmes d'un corps à l'autre se ferait soit par elles-mêmes, soit sous l'influence d'un autre principe. Si les âmes se transportent de leur propre gré, le processus ne s'accomplit pas par nécessité. Il pourrait alors y avoir des âmes qui s'opposent à la transmigration,

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43 al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 216.
44 *Ibid.*
45 al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 216–217; voir *infra.*

ce qui est absurde. Dans le deuxième cas, cet « autre » qui fait transmigrer les âmes est soit non-savant (ce qui mène à des conséquences absurdes), soit savant (*ḥakīm*). Si la transmigration est régie par un principe savant, les âmes transmigrent soit pour acquérir une vertu, soit pour se débarrasser d'un vice. Cela exclut d'emblée que le transport se fasse vers des corps d'animaux, car en de tels corps naturellement disposés au vice, il n'est pas possible de se purifier ou d'acquérir la vertu. Visiblement, al-Kirmānī ne partage pas l'enjouement d'un Sijistānī pour le monde animal !

Transmigrer dans des corps d'une même espèce, en occurrence à l'intérieur de l'espèce humaine, ne fait guère progresser l'âme dans la purification du vice ou dans l'acquisition de la vertu. Si une âme dépravée n'a fait qu'accumuler des vices dans son corps initial, il est peu probable qu'elle ne continue sur la même voie en changeant d'enveloppe corporelle. Par conséquent, la transmigration au sein de la même espèce est contraire à la sagesse et le transport des âmes d'un corps à l'autre est une thèse futile[46]. Ici, al-Kirmānī semble aller plus loin qu'al-Sijistānī : bien que sa réfutation porte principalement sur la transmigration dans les animaux, il rejette explicitement le passage de l'âme humaine d'un corps humain à l'autre.

Certains adeptes du *tanāsukh* soutiennent que la transmigration a pour objet de rétribuer les actions, bonnes et mauvaises, commises par l'âme en sa vie antérieure. Al-Kirmānī y répond (en citant Q 3:165) que la rétribution n'aura lieu que lors de la *qiyāma*, après que les *âmes* – et manifestement pas les corps ! – aient été ressuscitées. Ce bas monde n'étant pas le lieu de la rétribution, la transmigration telle que la comprennent les *ghulāt* est une chose vaine[47]. Nous reviendrons sur l'eschatologie d'al-Kirmānī à la fin de cet article.

Enfin, selon une autre opinion, les âmes se transportent d'un corps à l'autre afin d'y perfectionner la science et la pureté qu'elles n'avaient pu acquérir à cause de la corruption de leur corps précédent. Cela impliquerait que la science déjà acquise se conserve dans l'âme une fois entrée dans son nouveau corps. Or, nous constatons que les enfants sont tous dans un même état d'ignorance et ont tous le même besoin d'enseignement, ce qui prouve la futilité de cette thèse[48].

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[46] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 218–220.
[47] al-Kirmānī, *Tanbīh* 221.
[48] *Ibid.*

b. *Al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*

Dans cette réfutation du *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī* d'Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (m. 313/925), al-Kirmānī consacre un chapitre entier à attaquer les propos du médecin-philosophe qui, à la suite de Platon, aurait soutenu « que l'âme, après sa séparation d'avec le corps, est unie à un autre corps »[49]. Les arguments qu'il invoque sont sensiblement les mêmes que ceux qu'il avait employés pour réfuter les *ghulāt* dans le *Tanbīh al-hādī*. Il y introduit toutefois la conception aristotélicienne de l'âme comme forme d'un corps déterminé.

Si l'âme, une fois séparée de son corps, se joint à un autre corps, elle le fait soit d'elle-même, soit sous l'influence d'un principe qui lui est extérieur. La première hypothèse est impossible : tout corps étant nécessairement composé de matière et de forme et aucun corps ne pouvant exister sans forme, la forme d'un corps – en occurrence son âme – ne peut choisir d'entrer dans un autre corps et y chasser la forme sans laquelle ce corps ne pourrait exister. En d'autres termes : tout corps possède déjà une âme qui lui est propre et ne peut l'échanger contre une autre âme[50]. Lorsqu'une plante se corrompt, sa forme se corrompt avec elle; au moment même où une autre plante sort de la semence, elle possède déjà la forme qui lui est propre. Certes, l'âme humaine subsiste après la décomposition du corps, mais il est absurde qu'elle ait connaissance d'un embryon qui surgit quelque part « dans l'obscurité d'un utérus ou arrive par la naissance dans l'étendue de l'air », de sorte qu'elle puisse choisir de se joindre à lui[51].

Dans l'hypothèse que la jonction s'opère sous l'influence d'un principe extérieur doué de sagesse, il s'ensuit que le transport de l'âme d'un corps à l'autre se fait dans le but d'acquérir la vertu ou d'effacer le vice. Cela exclut d'emblée, pour les mêmes raisons déjà invoquées dans le *Tanbīh*, la passage de l'âme humaine en des corps d'animaux. Mais cela exclut

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[49] al-Kirmānī, *Aqwāl* 50–54. Il se réfère de toute évidence à un passage du *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī* (éd. Kraus, *Rasā'il* 30–31; trad. Brague, *Médecine spirituelle* 78), dans lequel al-Rāzī résume l'idée de Platon que les âmes impures et ignorantes restent continuellement attachées à des corps soumis à la génération et à la corruption. Toutefois, al-Rāzī n'y prend pas clairement position pour ou contre cette doctrine, contrairement à ce qu'affirme al-Kirmānī; cf. Walker, Metempsychosis 225–226.

[50] Cet argument est invoqué par Aristote pour réfuter la théorie de la transmigration défendue par les Pythagoriciens (*De Anima* 407b 22–25, 414a 20–28). Il sera repris par Ibn Sīnā; voir Monnot, Transmigration 285–288; Fenton, Metempsychosis, 343–344.

[51] al-Kirmānī, *Aqwāl* 50–51. Sans poser la question de façon explicite, l'exemple choisi par al-Kirmānī fait allusion à un débat antique qui perdura tout au long du Moyen-Âge : l'embryon est-il déjà animé ou l'âme n'entre-t-elle dans le corps qu'au moment de la naissance ?; voir Brisson, Congourdeau et Solère (éds.), *L'embryon* (la plupart des articles de cet ouvrage collectif se rapportent à cette question).

également la transmigration à l'intérieur de l'espèce humaine. En supposant qu'un tel transport soit possible sous l'influence d'un facteur extérieur à l'âme, celle-ci retournerait automatiquement en un état de puissance une fois entrée dans son nouveau corps, ce qui implique qu'elle repart à zéro, ayant perdu tous ses acquis lors de sa vie antérieure. De toute façon, effacer des vices ou acquérir des vertus en changeant d'enveloppe charnelle est une chose impossible. Al-Kirmānī illustre cette impossibilité à l'aide de l'exemple d'une datte non mûre (*busra*) tombée prématurément d'un palmier. Il serait absurde de croire que cette datte puisse perdre son amertume et acquérir le goût sucré qui lui manque en se joignant à une autre grappe que celle dont elle est tombée[52].

Par conséquent, la transmigration (*tanaqqul*) de l'âme d'un corps à l'autre est une doctrine vaine. Après sa séparation avec le corps, l'âme subsiste dans l'état auquel elle est parvenue par ses actions bonnes et mauvaises, sans s'unir à un autre corps. Malheureusement, al-Kirmānī ne nous en dit pas plus sur le sort *post mortem* de l'âme.

Il achève sa réfutation de la transmigration en reprenant les arguments du *Tanbīh* contre la préexistence des âmes humaines dans le monde intelligible et leur descente ici-bas suite à une faute[53].

Nous pouvons conclure de ce qui précède qu'al-Kirmānī semble rejeter toute forme de transmigration des âmes, adoptant ainsi une position plus radicale qu'al-Sijistānī, qui se heurtait avant tout au passage des âmes humaines dans des corps non-humains afin d'expier une faute commise avant leur descente sur terre.

III. Baʿth et qiyāma : les deux phases de la résurrection

Ces polémiques contre la doctrine de la transmigration attribuée à Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, les Nuṣayris et autres *ghulāt*, soulèvent des problèmes délicats quant à la compréhension de l'eschatologie ismaélienne partagée aussi bien par al-Sijistānī que par al-Kirmānī. En effet, en tant qu'Ismaéliens, ces deux auteurs défendent une eschatologie qui s'éloigne sensiblement de la norme généralement admise par l'islam dit « orthodoxe ».

Rappelons les principaux éléments qui caractérisent l'eschatologie ismaélienne d'époque fatimide. Tant que dure notre présent cycle d'occultation (*dawr al-satr*) inauguré par Adam (ou Noé), le salut de

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[52] al-Kirmānī, *Aqwāl* 51–52.
[53] al-Kirmānī, *Aqwāl* 53–54.

l'âme humaine réside dans l'acquisition simultanée de la vertu par l'application des préceptes de la charia (« le culte par la pratique », *al-ʿibāda al-ʿamaliyya*) et du *ʿilm al-bāṭin* enseigné par les Imāms (« le culte par la science », *al-ʿibāda al-ʿilmiyya*). Toutefois, son salut (ou sa damnation, pour ceux qui ont négligé les deux cultes) ne peut être pleinement réalisé aussi longtemps que la connaissance salvatrice n'a pas été révélée en son intégralité par le Résurrecteur (Qā'im) lors de la Grande Résurrection (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) qui marque l'abrogation de toutes les lois antérieures et l'ouverture d'un cycle de manifestation (*dawr al-kashf*)[54].

Privée de la totalité du *ʿilm al-bāṭin*, l'âme est incapable de se purifier entièrement de ses attaches corporelles (al-Sijistānī) ou d'acquérir sa seconde perfection en devenant une intelligence en acte, à l'instar des Intelligences du monde intelligible auxquelles les âmes bienheureuses se conjoignent (al-Kirmānī). Cela implique qu'en attendant la *qiyāma*, l'âme reste nécessairement attachée à un substrat corporel.

Par ailleurs, la *qiyāma* est une résurrection purement spirituelle : c'est l'âme qui est « ressuscitée », « rendue à la vie » car transformée par la gnose révélée par le Qā'im. Les âmes sauvées qui sont disposées à la recevoir, accèderont à la béatitude éternelle; les âmes obscurcies par le vice et l'ignorance ne sauront en tirer profit et demeureront à jamais tourmentées par leurs passions. La vie dans l'Au-delà ne concerne que les âmes : les corps ne seront pas ressuscités lors de la *qiyāma*.

Toutefois, nos auteurs ismaéliens distinguent la *qiyāma* du *baʿth*, qui est antérieur à l'avènement du Qā'im et qui, de surcroît, semble se rapporter à la résurrection des corps telle qu'elle est décrite dans le Coran. Mais pourquoi faut-il ressusciter les corps des défunts si la *qiyāma* ne s'applique qu'aux âmes et si la survie dans l'Au-delà n'est pas corporelle ? Cette résurrection des corps concernerait-elle le substrat corporel dans lequel l'âme doit demeurer avant la *qiyāma* ?

Il n'est pas facile de répondre à ces questions, vu l' « écriture ésotérique » que nos auteurs adoptent en les abordant. Tout en partageant avec al-Sijistānī les composantes majeures de cette eschatologie, al-Kirmānī semble se démarquer de son prédécesseur, sans doute par souci d'échapper à une forme de métempsycose impliquée par les positions de ce dernier[55].

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[54] Voir De Smet, Loi rationnelle 515–544; Id., Adam 187–202.

[55] Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 134–141 et Landolt, Unveiling 77–80 ont très bien entrevu que la notion de *baʿth* telle qu'elle est développée dans les ouvrages d'al-Sijistānī

1. *Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī*

a. *Kashf al-maḥjūb*

Tournons-nous tout d'abord vers cet ouvrage, un de ceux à cause desquels al-Sijistānī fut accusé de professer la métempsycose, bien qu'il contienne une réfutation explicite du *tanāsukh*[56].

L'auteur y évoque dans le sixième chapitre le « Seigneur de la *qiyāma* » (*khudhāwand-i qiyāmat*), qui ouvrira le « cycle de manifestation » en révélant le *bāṭin* de toutes les révélations et de toutes les lois antérieures. Les âmes vivant dans notre présent cycle d'occultation sont atteintes de maladies graves. Les prophètes et les Imāms qui se succèdent au cours des sept cycles[57] que compte le présent cycle d'occultation, leur apportent des remèdes de plus en plus efficaces, mais ce n'est qu'au terme du septième et dernier cycle que le « Seigneur de la *qiyāma* » prescrira le remède qui vaincra définitivement la maladie[58].

La *qiyāma* est clairement distinguée de la notion de *bar-angīkhtan* qui forme l'objet du septième et dernier chapitre. *Bar-angīkhtan* traduit en persan le terme arabe *baʿth*, comme l'auteur le précise explicitement[59]. Ce chapitre est d'une complexité redoutable, d'autant plus que le terme est employé en des sens à première vue multiples. D'une manière générale, *bar-angīkhtan* désigne le « faire-être » (*būdan kardan*), le fait d'être appelé ou rappelé à l'existence. Ainsi, l'émanation (*inbiʿāth*) du monde intelligible à partir de l'Intellect se fait sous le mode du *bar-angīkhtan* : l'Âme universelle est « appelée à l'existence » par l'auto-intellection de l'Intellect, tout comme la Nature est « appelée à l'existence » par l'Âme. Il en va de même de la genèse et la corruption des êtres du monde sensible : ils sont continuellement appelés et rappelés à l'existence par la Nature, ce qui garantit la permanence de notre monde sublunaire[60].

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que j'analyserai dans les pages qui vont suivre, suppose une forme de métempsycose. Mon interprétation se situe dans le prolongement de cette lecture.

[56] Voir *supra*, p. 85–86.

[57] Rappelons qu'al-Sijistānī appartenait, du moins jusqu'à un certain moment de sa carrière comme *dāʿī*, à la tradition carmathe. Cela signifie qu'il considérait Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl comme le septième Nāṭiq, inaugurant le septième et dernier cycle qui sera clôturé avec son retour en tant que Qāʾim; voir Landolt, Unveiling 74 n. 2, 76–77.

[58] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 81–83; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 114–116; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 118–120.

[59] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 83; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 117; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 120.

[60] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 83; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 117–118; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 120–121.

Al-Sijistānī applique aussitôt ce principe aux défunts qui sont rappelés à la vie, ainsi qu'aux vivants qui sont rappelés à la mort. Comme tous les êtres de ce bas monde se succèdent en une chaîne ininterrompue de générations et de corruptions, les naissances et les décès s'alternent continuellement. Toutefois, le *bar-angīkhtan* repose sur un principe fondamental, à savoir la récompense des vertueux et le châtiment des méchants[61]. Il s'agit de toute évidence d'une résurrection corporelle, puisque l'auteur enchaîne avec une série d'arguments visant à prouver que tous les morts ne sont pas ressuscités. Y échappent notamment les âmes des enfants morts en bas âge, des insensés ou des personnes ayant vécu à des époques ou en des contrées qui n'ont pas connu de révélation divine. Tous les individus appelés à ressusciter le seront avec leurs corps, car l'existence d'une âme sans corps est impossible[62]. Il s'agit là d'une affirmation bien surprenante de la part d'un auteur qui nie explicitement la résurrection corporelle lors de la *qiyāma* !

On peut déduire de ce qui précède que *bar-angīkhtan* ou *ba'th* se réfère à un processus de régénération continue du monde de la nature, dans laquelle s'inscrit la recréation des corps humains en fonction des vertus ou des vices acquis par l'âme, et cela en attendant l'avènement du Qā'im.

Malgré l'obscurité et l'ambiguïté voulues par l'auteur – dans la partie suivante du chapitre il soutient longuement que « la connaissance du *bar-angīkhtan* reste voilée à l'âme » – cette doctrine se précise par certaines remarques glissées dans le texte, qui toutefois ne sont pas explicitées. Ainsi, au moment de venir dans le corps, l'âme possède déjà une science (acquise lors d'une vie antérieure ?); toutes les connaissances qu'elle acquiert pendant son séjour dans ce corps, sont conservées et occultées au moment où elle s'en sépare (afin qu'elle puisse à nouveau les déployer dans le corps suivant ?)[63]. L'âme qui a obtenu une connaissance de sa propre essence (par l'enseignement des prophètes et des Imāms ?) sait qu'elle est descendue, quitte (le corps), monte et puis entre à nouveau dans la voie (entre dans un nouveau corps ?), sans chercher à connaître le *bar-angīkhtan* dont la nature lui reste voilée. En revanche, les âmes qui sont privées de cette science se font des représentations fausses. Elles s'imaginent, entre autres, qu'une âme puisse subsister sans corps ou

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[61] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 84–85; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 118–119; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 121–122.

[62] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 85–86; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 119–120; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 122–123.

[63] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 87; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 121; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 123.

elles professent le *tanāsukh*. Une des raisons pour lesquelles le *bar-angīkhtan* reste voilé à l'âme réside dans le fait qu'elle peut être rappelée à l'existence à un degré supérieur ou à un degré inférieur. Si elle connaissait à l'avance son sort futur, elle ne s'appliquerait plus à poursuivre la vertu et le bien[64].

Le *bar-angīkhtan* concerne également une renaissance spirituelle de l'âme qui accepte l'enseignement d'un maître (*muʿallim*, à savoir l'Imām). L'âme se purifie ainsi graduellement. Cela peut avoir lieu en son corps actuel; mais si elle est jointe à un corps plus harmonieux, moins enclin au vice, le processus de purification n'en sera que renforcé. Par ailleurs, le *bar-angīkhtan* peut s'effectuer à des intervalles plus ou moins longs. Car, il arrive qu'un disciple à la recherche du Maître (l'Imām) le trouve immédiatement : alors sa renaissance spirituelle est instantanée. Mais il arrive aussi que ce disciple ne parvient pas à entrer en contact avec le Maître pendant sa vie, ce qui nécessite un temps plus long avant que ne s'accomplisse pour lui la renaissance spirituelle (lors d'une vie future dans un nouveau corps ?)[65].

Contrairement à la *qiyāma*, qui est un événement unique qui adviendra lors de la clôture du septième cycle, les résurrections se succèdent tout au long des cycles prophétiques. Ainsi, al-Sijistānī craint que si les hommes futurs continuent à se comporter d'une façon contraire à la raison, l'ordre cosmique sera finalement aboli. Cela aurait des conséquences néfastes pour tous ceux qui seront ressuscités au cours des cycles qui restent à boucler (avant la *qiyāma*)[66].

Une lecture attentive de ce chapitre mène à la conclusion que le *bar-angīkhtan* ou *baʿth* se réfère, entre autres, à la recréation continuelle des corps humains afin d'accueillir les âmes en voie de se purifier, en voie de renaître par l'acquisition progressive du *ʿilm al-bāṭin*, en attendant leur résurrection spirituelle définitive au moment de la *qiyāma* où elles pourront se passer de tout substrat corporel. Par conséquent, al-Bīrūnī avait sans doute raison de reconnaître dans le *Kashf al-maḥjūb* une forme de métempsycose[67]. Malheureusement, al-Sijistānī ne précise pas si sa

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[64] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 87–88; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 121–122; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 123–124.

[65] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 90–92; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 123–126; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 125–126.

[66] al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 94; trad. Corbin, *Dévoilement* 127–128; trad. Landolt, Unveiling 127–128.

[67] Une interprétation analogue a été proposée par Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 135–138, ainsi que par Landolt, Unveiling 77–78.

doctrine du *baʿth* implique un nombre fini d'âmes humaines, argument souvent invoqué par les tenants de la transmigration.

b. Kitāb al-iftikhār

La distinction entre *qiyāma* et *baʿth*, suggérée dans le *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, est explicitée dans le *Kitāb al-iftikhār*, où chaque notion est traitée dans un chapitre différent[68]. Dans son exposé sur la *qiyāma*, al-Sijistānī souligne que la doctrine des « exotéristes » (*ahl al-ẓāhir*) et des tenants de la philosophie (*aṣḥāb al-falsafa*) à ce sujet est fausse et contraire aux enseignements des *ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq*.

Les « exotéristes » qui se tiennent à une lecture littérale des versets coraniques se rapportant à la *qiyāma*, croient que les corps des défunts seront ressuscités et que leurs âmes apparaîtront devant le Juge avec les corps qu'elles habitaient lors de leur vie terrestre, avant d'être envoyées au Paradis ou en Enfer avec ces mêmes corps. Pour al-Sijistānī, il s'agit là d'une croyance vaine, contraire à la raison, qui ignore complètement la réalité de la *qiyāma*. Celle-ci se réfère en fait à un « état spirituel psychique » (*ḥāl rūḥānī nafsānī*) : la *qiyāma* est purement spirituelle[69].

Quant aux *falāsifa*, ils nient tout simplement la *qiyāma*, étant persuadés que la béatitude de l'âme s'obtient par la seule pratique de la philosophie. Pour les *ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq*, en revanche, la *qiyāma* se réalise « à partir de la manifestation d'une âme pure (*nafs zakiyya*) [c'est-à-dire le Qāʾim] dans laquelle jaillissent (*yatajallā*) les influences (*āthār*) du monde de la lumière, qui lui donnent la puissance de rétribuer les âmes »[70]. Avant l'apparition de cette « âme pure » qui inaugurera une *daʿwa ʿilmiyya*, ces influences du monde de la lumière sont cachées dans la *daʿwa ʿamaliyya* instaurée par les prophètes successifs. Il advient donc au Qāʾim d'abroger le *ẓāhir* des révélations et des lois antérieures et de révéler le *ʿilm al-bāṭin* en son intégralité, permettant ainsi la renaissance des âmes : c'est cela la *qiyāma*[71].

Si le chapitre sur la *qiyāma* s'explique aisément dans le cadre de la doctrine ismaélienne courante à l'époque d'al-Sijistānī, il en est tout autre du chapitre sur le *baʿth*, qui traite manifestement d'une résurrection corporelle. Dès lors, la question resurgit : pourquoi faut-il une résurrection corporelle si la résurrection finale est purement spirituelle ?

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[68] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 181–195 (*fī maʿrifat al-qiyāma*); 196–205 (*fī maʿrifat al-baʿth*).
[69] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 182–184.
[70] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 186.
[71] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 194.

Une fois de plus, le texte est intentionnellement obscur, l'auteur n'explicitant pas la doctrine sous-jacente. Il commence par affirmer que la manière dont les *ahl al-ẓāhir* conçoivent la résurrection des morts (*baʿth al-amwāt*) par Dieu est dénuée de sens. Il se demande notamment pourquoi, selon l'opinion des exotéristes, la résurrection des hommes (*baʿth al-khalq*) ne s'effectuerait qu'en un seul moment (*sāʿa wāḥida*). Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas des résurrections (*baʿāthāt*) successives, comme il y a des décès successifs ? En effet : « peut-être la résurrection est-elle apparue de nombreuses fois » (*wa-laʿalla al-baʿth qad ẓahara marāran*)[72].

Malheureusement, al-Sijistānī ne répond pas clairement à ces questions troublantes. Il s'engage plutôt à démontrer l'impossibilité de la position des exotéristes selon laquelle Dieu ressuscitera (en vue du Jugement dernier) pour chaque âme un corps identique à celui qu'elle habitait lors de sa vie terrestre, avec la même peau, les mêmes os, la même chair. Pour notre auteur, cela est contraire à la raison. L'architecte d'une maison qui s'est écroulée suite à un tremblement de terre, peut la reconstruire s'il en a gardé le plan en mémoire, mais il emploiera nécessairement d'autres matériaux, de sorte que la seconde maison ne sera pas identique à la première. D'où la thèse des *ahl al-ḥaqāʾiq* :

> Dieu ressuscite les créatures et les rend à la vie par sa puissance parfaite, éminente et noble, comme Il le veut et comme sa sagesse l'exige, sans avoir besoin pour cela de faire revivre les créatures mortes à partir de leurs membres qui ont été dispersés[73].

Après avoir évoqué l'opinion des exotéristes qui situent le *baʿth* après l'anéantissement de l'espèce humaine – après le décès du « dernier homme » – l'auteur la réfute en revenant à la multiplicité des résurrections corporelles qui se succèdent au cours des siècles. Comment peut-on concilier avec la justice divine (*ʿadl*) le fait qu'une personne décédée dix ans après Adam reste sous terre pendant sept mille ans, alors que le « dernier homme » n'y demeure qu'un bref instant ? Dieu ne serait-Il pas capable de ressusciter les morts des premiers temps avant que tous les hommes ne soient décédés ? Cela est contraire à ce que l'on observe dans le monde de la nature :

> Quant aux choses naturelles qui disparaissent les unes après les autres, il n'est pas possible de s'imaginer que l'être (*kawn*) dont la disparition est

[72] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 196–197; cf. Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 140.
[73] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 200.

> postérieure soit simultanée à l'être dont la disparition est antérieure. Au contraire, l'être dont la disparition est antérieure recevra l'être plus vite que ce dont la disparition est postérieure, sauf s'il lui advient une cause ou une raison qui empêche cela [...]. Qu'en est-il alors des personnes décédées à l'époque d'Adam : leur position face à la résurrection (*baʿth*) est-elle identique [à la position] de ceux dont l'être et la disparition sont postérieurs[74] ?

Au lieu de répondre à cette question, al-Sijistānī cite Q 2:260, verset dans lequel, selon lui, Dieu révéla à Abraham le secret du *baʿth* :

> Abraham dit : 'Mon Seigneur ! Montre-moi comment tu rends la vie aux morts'. Dieu dit : 'Est-ce que tu ne crois pas ?' Il répondit : 'Oui, je crois, mais c'est pour que mon cœur soit apaisé'. Dieu dit : 'Prends quatre oiseaux, coupe-les en morceaux, place ensuite les parts sur des monts séparés; puis, appelle-les : ils accourront vers toi en toute hâte. Sache que Dieu est puissant et sage (trad. Denise Masson).

Selon le *taʾwīl* proposé par notre auteur, Dieu enseigne en ce verset que

> La disposition naturelle (*jibilla*) de l'homme est composée de quatre natures. Chacune de ces natures est un oiseau qui s'envole après sa disparition et retourne vers sa base (*aṣl*) à partir de laquelle elle a été formée : la bile noire [retourne] vers la terre, le flegme vers l'eau, le sang vers l'air et la gale vers le feu. Chacun de ces quatre éléments est une montagne pour ces natures et ces mélanges dont l'homme a été créé. Celui dont la magnificence est sanctifiée lui a enseigné que sa composition et la composition de tous les hommes [sont faites] à partir de ces quatre natures et que, par conséquent, elles retournent vers leurs « montagnes », c'est-à-dire vers leurs éléments. Dieu a voulu redonner la vie au mort et le ressusciter. Il nous la donne rapidement, sans intervalle ni délai[75].

Il ressort de cette exégèse et de tout ce qui précède que le *baʿth* n'est pas un événement unique qui aura lieu à la fin des temps et qu'il ne consiste pas à reconstituer les corps des défunts à l'identique, en restituant sa peau, ses os, sa chair. À la mort du corps, ses composantes retournent aux quatre éléments dont elles sont constituées; puis, à partir de ces éléments, Dieu recrée un nouveau corps. Il rend ainsi instantanément le défunt à la vie, « sans intervalle, ni délai ». Ces résurrections sont continues, en attendant l'avènement de la *qiyāma*. Celle-ci sera une résurrection purement spirituelle, car à ce moment les âmes n'auront plus besoin de corps pour subsister.

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[74] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 202.
[75] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 203.

Un autre passage du *Kitāb al-iftikhār* confirme d'une façon assez explicite cette réincarnation successive des âmes individuelles dans l'attente de l'avènement du Qā'im :

> Les âmes partielles qui sont jointes aux corps pendant de longues périodes (*fī l-azmina*) sont les véhicules (*marākib*) de l'âme pure (*al-nafs al-zakiyya*; *i.e.* le Qā'im) qui apparaîtra dans un corps harmonieux (*shakhṣ mu'tadil*) afin d'accomplir sa mission[76].

c. *Al-Risāla al-bāhira*

Ce traité, un de ceux dans lesquels al-Sijistānī aurait soutenu la métempsycose au dire de Nāṣir-i Khusraw[77], est pour une large part une réfutation de l'eschatologie musulmane traditionnelle. L'auteur veut montrer que la manière dont les *ahl al-ẓāhir* comprennent les signes apocalyptiques annonçant la fin des temps, la résurrection des corps, le Jugement dernier et la rétribution finale ne fait que trahir leur ignorance en matière de religion.

Al-Sijistānī commence par esquisser une distinction entre les âmes corrompues et les âmes vertueuses. Les premières, dans lesquelles résident les imperfections et les vices qui sont des caractéristiques du monde de la nature, sont entièrement sous l'emprise des corps célestes. Les corps auxquels elles s'unissent, sont générés sous l'influence de ces mêmes corps célestes, qui les constituent comme des corps dénués de tempérance et enclins à toutes sortes d'excès. Une fois entrées en de tels corps, ces âmes s'enfonceront toujours davantage dans la dépravation. Les âmes vertueuses, en revanche, s'ouvrent aux émanations du monde intelligible qui conduisent au bonheur et au salut. Les corps célestes génèrent pour elles des corps harmonieux, d'une tempérance parfaite, dans lesquels elles pourront parachever leur perfectionnement[78].

En supposant que les âmes aient acquis les vices et les vertus lors d'une vie antérieure sur terre, le texte signifierait qu'elles renaissent dans des corps qui sont disposés en fonction du degré d'impureté ou de pureté des âmes qu'ils ont vocation à accueillir.

Les signes eschatologiques décrits dans le Coran ne se réfèrent pas à des changements dans le cours normal de la nature (ce qui est impossible,

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[76] al-Sijistānī, *Iftikhār* 149; voir Landolt, Unveiling 79; De Smet, Nāṣir 125. Sur la notion du « véhicule », voir *ibid.* 121–125.

[77] Voir *supra*, p. 81.

[78] al-Sijistānī, *Bāhira* 40.

car contraire à la raison), mais à des changements psychiques, notamment dans les âmes des dépravés, dont les corps adoptent – à mesure qu'approche la *qiyāma* – des comportements de plus en plus similaires à ceux des animaux sauvages et des bêtes féroces[79].

De même, la *qiyāma* est un événement purement spirituel lié aux « influences psychiques » (*ta'thīrāt nafsāniyya*) qui se manifesteront avec l'apparition d'une « âme pure » (*nafs zakiyya*, c.-à-d. le Qā'im) qui a obtenu, par émanation à partir de l'Intellect, une « éminence » (*faḍīla*) dont elle fera bénéficier les âmes individuelles de tous les cycles antérieurs. Les âmes vertueuses sauront tirer profit de ces « émanations liées à la science et à l'intellect » (*ifāḍāt ʿilmiyya ʿaqliyya*) et recevront ainsi leur récompense éternelle. Les âmes dépravées et impures, en revanche, resteront privées de cette lumière : c'est cela l'Enfer pour elles[80].

Al-Sijistānī aborde alors la question du sort des âmes avant l'avènement de la *qiyāma*. Il précise immédiatement qu'il s'agit là d'une matière « très difficile à comprendre, n'étant accessible qu'à celui qui possède une âme pure habituée à percevoir les choses spirituelles et lumineuses » ! Seuls ceux qui possèdent la « connaissance des *barzakhs* » (*maʿrifat al-barāzikh*) sont en mesure d'y répondre[81].

Selon l'eschatologie traditionnelle, le terme coranique *barzakh* désigne le lieu où résident les âmes des défunts en attendant la résurrection et où elles éprouvent déjà un avant-goût des délices ou des tourments qui les attendent dans l'Au-delà[82]. Mais al-Sijistānī emploie le terme au pluriel, comme le feront plus tard les Ismaéliens ṭayyibites dans leurs spéculations sur la métempsycose et la métamorphose. En effet, pour ces derniers, les *barzakhs* sont les corps dans lesquels les âmes doivent continuellement transmigrer jusqu'à l'avènement du Qā'im[83].

L'explication qu'al-Sijistānī donne de cette « connaissance des *barzakhs* » est obscure et voilée. Selon lui, elle implique que le monde est à tout moment rempli d'âmes unies à des corps. Si des corps disparaissent, ils sont immédiatement remplacés par d'autres corps similaires. Or, le corps remplaçant (*al-mustakhlaf*) possède la même forme (*ṣūra*) que le corps qui a péri. En supposant que la « forme » désigne l'âme, il s'ensuit que les corps et les âmes se succèdent continuellement, de sorte que les

79 al-Sijistānī, *Bāhira* 42.
80 al-Sijistānī, *Bāhira* 45, 48–49.
81 al-Sijistānī, *Bāhira* 46.
82 Guiraud, Barzakh 114–118.
83 De Smet, Scarabées 39–54.

âmes renaissent dans des corps recréés, tout en conservant les connaissances, les vertus et les vices acquis lors de leurs vies antérieures. En effet, nous dit l'auteur, ceux qui vivent aujourd'hui en ce monde ont acquis de ceux qui ont péri l'ensemble des sciences qu'ils possèdent, leur manière de parler, d'écrire et de gouverner. Puis, il poursuit :

> Ceux-là [*i.e.* les contemporains], ce sont les *barzakhs* de ceux qui ont péri. Les âmes ne sont autres que ce qu'ils leur ont légué. Chaque groupe (*ṭā'ifa*) parmi les pieux, les débauchés, les errants et les bien-guidés transmet à ceux qui les remplacent après eux et auxquels ils ont légué leur héritage, ce qu'ils ont hérité de ceux qui ont péri [avant eux]. Cela, parce que l'obtention de la récompense ou du châtiment par les âmes ayant acquis le bien ou le mal, perdure et reste fermement établie jusqu'à l'avènement de la Grande Résurrection[84].

Bien sûr, la formulation est ambiguë, mais dans le contexte du traité il n'y a aucun doute que la « connaissance des *barzakhs* » se réfère à une forme de métempsycose selon laquelle les âmes renaissent continuellement en des corps dont la nature est disposée en fonction du degré de pureté ou de souillure des âmes pour lesquelles ils serviront d'enveloppe charnelle[85]. Cela pourrait impliquer en même temps que le nombre des âmes est limité.

2. *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*

La forme particulière de métempsycose que suppose la doctrine du *baʿth* élaborée par al-Sijistānī, est rejetée par al-Kirmānī. Toutefois, à ce sujet, il n'attaque jamais de façon explicite son prédécesseur, avec lequel il partage par ailleurs les principaux thèmes de l'eschatologie ismaélienne. À première vue, al-Kirmānī semble plus proche de l'orthodoxie musulmane, mais il ne s'agit là que d'une impression suscitée par son « écriture ésotérique ». En effet, dans son approche plus traditionnelle de l'eschatologie, il introduit par endroits des notions et des doctrines étrangères et incompatibles avec les normes généralement admises en islam. Il en résulte que les derniers chapitres du *Kitāb rāḥat al-ʿaql* consacrés à l'eschatologie, sont de loin les plus difficiles et les plus obscures de ce livre si complexe et si dense.

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[84] al-Sijistānī, *Bāhira* 46–47.

[85] Voir également Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī 138–139. D'ailleurs, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Khwān* 132–133, a clairement reconnu une forme de métempsycose dans la doctrine du *barzakh* telle qu'elle fut défendue par al-Sijistānī, cf. De Smet, Nāṣir 128–129.

Parmi les nombreuses questions relatives à l'eschatologie qui ouvrent le 13e « carrefour » du *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*, figure la suivante : « l'âme, après s'être séparée et libérée de son enveloppe charnelle, se joint-elle à un autre corps, comme le disent les partisans du *ghuluww* et du *tanāsukh*, ou non ?[86] ».

Dès les premières pages du chapitre, al-Kirmānī expose les principes majeurs de son eschatologie : le salut de l'âme réside dans son actualisation intégrale (sa « seconde perfection »); l'Au-delà se situe dans le monde intelligible (« le monde des intelligences et du *malakūt* »); si les corps ont été créés par la « première génération » (*al-nashʾa al-ūlā*), les âmes sont ressuscitées, rendues à la vie, par la « seconde génération » (*al-nashʾa al-ākhira*) qui est le *baʿth*[87].

Abordant alors la question du *baʿth*, al-Kirmānī avertit immédiatement le lecteur qu'elle ne peut être saisie que « par la puissance de celui qui est inspiré (ou soutenu) à partir du ciel » (*bi-quwwat al-muʾayyad min al-samāʾ*), à savoir l'Imām. À défaut d'une telle aide divine, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, les *ghulāt* et les partisans du *tanāsukh* ont soutenu la préexistence de l'âme par rapport au corps et ses réincarnations successives, considérées comme nécessaires à sa purification. Manifestement – et c'est là un point important – al-Kirmānī associe le *baʿth* (ou du moins une fausse compréhension de cette notion) à la transmigration. Il enchaîne avec une définition énigmatique du *baʿth* :

> Le *baʿth* est l'action de Dieu, par l'intermédiaire des Anges Rapprochés, sur le ressuscité naturel (*al-mabʿūth al-ṭabīʿī*), comme une perfection pour lui, afin qu'il devienne un être émané par émanation seconde (*inbiʿāth thānī*)[88].

Cette « émanation seconde » est l'inspiration divine (*taʾyīd ilāhī*) qui se déverse à partir du monde intelligible – dont les dix Intelligences sont identifiées aux Anges Rapprochés du Coran – dans l'âme du ressuscité qui se trouve dans le monde de la nature. Ainsi, cette âme est disposée à accéder sans trop de difficultés à sa perfection seconde, « puisque le ressuscité devient dans la perfection un être émané qui est en acte »[89].

En d'autres termes, le *baʿth* est une renaissance spirituelle qui prépare l'âme vertueuse à accéder à sa perfection finale. Toutefois, il ne s'agit pas de la résurrection ultime. En effet, nous dit al-Kirmānī en se référant à Q 39:68, le *baʿth* correspond au premier souffle dans la trompette, alors

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86 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 359.
87 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 360–361.
88 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 364.
89 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 365.

que le second souffle se rapporte à la *qiyāma*. Celle-ci n'adviendra que lorsque les cycles seront bouclés avec l'apparition du Qā'im, le « Seigneur du septième cycle » qui dévoilera le sens véritable de toutes les révélations antérieures[90].

Au moment de la *qiyāma*, l'ensemble des âmes purifiées et ressuscitées au cours de tous les cycles antérieurs, accèderont à leur seconde perfection par l'émanation que l'Esprit de sainteté (*rūḥ al-quds*) – le premier Intellect – leur fera parvenir par l'intermédiaire du « Seigneur du septième cycle ». Alors, les âmes sauvées, pleinement actualisées, pourront subsister sans aucune attache corporelle, ayant atteint le rang des Intelligences du monde intelligible. Elles rejoindront ce monde pour y goûter la béatitude éternelle[91].

Par conséquent, la *qiyāma* est une résurrection purement spirituelle : il n'y a pas de résurrection des corps, puisque les bienheureux deviendront des intelligences en acte unies au monde intelligible qui, par définition, est dénué de toute forme de corporalité. La *qiyāma* est distincte du *ba'th*, ce dernier n'étant pas lié à l'apparition du Qā'im. Jusqu'à ce point, al-Kirmānī est en accord avec la doctrine d'al-Sijistānī.

Par ailleurs, al-Kirmānī nous dit explicitement qu'il faut attendre l'avènement de la *qiyāma* avant que les âmes puissent se libérer de leurs attaches corporelles en accédant à la seconde perfection. Or, il y a une résurrection antérieure à la *qiyāma* : le *ba'th*, le « premier souffle dans la trompette ». Les âmes ainsi ressuscitées ne pourront donc se passer de substrat corporel. Comment alors concevoir ce substrat ? Le *ba'th* implique-t-il en même temps la recréation du corps, comme c'est le cas chez al-Sijistānī ?

Notre auteur aborde ces questions avec beaucoup de circonspection, en des termes voilés et non dénués d'ambiguïté, tout en polémiquant contre la transmigration des âmes. Visiblement, il était bien conscient du caractère délicat de la matière.

De prime abord, il adopte une position traditionnelle en soutenant que les âmes justes et les âmes impies, lorsqu'elles se séparent de leurs corps, n'entrent pas directement au Paradis ou en Enfer, mais se rassemblent dans le *barzakh*. Il cite à l'appui Q 23:100 : « une barrière se trouve derrière eux jusqu'au Jour où ils seront ressuscités » (*wa min warā'ihim barzakhun ilā yawmi yub'athūna*). Les âmes y séjournent jusqu'à l'avènement de la

[90] al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 365–368.
[91] al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql* 392–394, 397.

qiyāma : les bienheureux y reçoivent un avant-goût des délices du Paradis, tandis que les damnés y sont initiés aux tourments de l'Enfer[92]. Afin d'expliquer le sens du verset coranique, al-Kirmānī cite aussitôt un long *ḥadīth* (non-canonique) qui fait dire au Prophète :

> Lorsque le défunt est porté dans la tombe, il est soumis à un interrogatoire. S'il fait partie de ceux qui ont professé l'unicité de Dieu (*tawḥīd*) et qui ont agi en obéissance à Lui et à son envoyé, la porte du Paradis lui est ouverte. Les actions qu'il a faites en adorant Dieu se concrétisent pour lui sous la forme d'une personne (ou d'un corps humain, *tashkhaṣu*) qui le console dans la détresse qu'il éprouve dans la tombe et lui annonce qu'il fait partie des élus. Ainsi, son âme est dans un état de quiétude (*rāḥa*) jusqu'au Jour de la *qiyāma*, étant sûre qu'elle fera partie des habitants du Paradis [...]. En revanche, s'il appartient à ceux qui se sont rendu coupables d'associationnisme (*shirk*), qui ont désobéi, se sont montré orgueilleux et qui ont négligé et omis l'adoration [de Dieu], la porte de la Géhenne lui est ouverte. Ses actions viles deviennent pour lui un animal (*ḥayawān*) qui le tourmente et le remplit de terreur, de sorte qu'il demeure dans la détresse et la frayeur jusqu'au Jour de la *qiyāma*, étant sûr d'appartenir aux habitants de l'Enfer[93].

Al-Kirmānī cite ce *ḥadīth* sans le moindre commentaire. Mais, à la lumière de ce qu'il vient d'exposer en ce chapitre du *Rāḥat al-ʿAql*, on pourrait tenter d'en donner l'interprétation suivante. Après la mort du corps, l'âme – en attendant la *qiyāma* – a besoin d'un substrat corporel, qui n'est autre que le *barzakh*. Puisque le *baʿth* des âmes vertueuses s'accomplit avant la *qiyāma*, il doit avoir lieu dans le *barzakh*. Par conséquent, l'âme est ressuscitée spirituellement, mais elle reçoit en même temps un corps (*shakhṣ*) dans lequel elle éprouve déjà les délices du paradis, c'est-à-dire un corps qui lui facilite l'accès à la perfection seconde. Les âmes damnées, en revanche, sont ressuscitées en un corps ayant des dispositions animales, enclin aux vices et aux passions, qui les entraîne toujours plus loin dans la dépravation.

En effet, al-Kirmānī nous décrit la déchéance croissante des « hypocrites » – (*munāfiqūn*), terme par lequel il désigne tous ceux qui s'opposent aux « gens du bien et de l'éminence » et qui agissent contrairement aux commandements de Dieu – de la façon suivante : lorsque leurs corps se corrompent, leurs âmes retournent (dans d'autres corps ?) et « voyagent (*sālika*) dans les abîmes du châtiment et de l'obscurité ». Elles subissent

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92 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 389–390.
93 al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 390.

des transformations continues, jusqu'à se retrouver au niveau le plus bas de l'Enfer[94].

Le *ḥadīth* du Prophète, pris à la lettre, semble confirmer la doctrine ṭayyibite de la métempsycose et de la métamorphose. Selon celle-ci, le *barzakh* désigne globalement les corps dans lesquels les âmes doivent se réincarner en attendant la *qiyāma*. Les âmes pures se réincarnent dans des corps humains (*ashkhāṣ*) purs et vertueux; les âmes dépravées se réincarnent dans des corps d'animaux de plus en plus abjects.

Certes, telle n'est pas la lecture qu'en fait al-Kirmānī. Car pour lui, le *barzakh* ne fait pas partie de notre monde terrestre. Il le caractérise comme « l'endroit le plus élevé du monde de la nature », un « macrocosme » (*ʿālam kabīr*) qui est proche du monde intelligible, tout en lui étant extérieur[95]. Le *baʿth*, comme renaissance spirituelle et recréation d'un substrat pour l'âme incapable de se détacher de ses attaches corporelles avant la *qiyāma*, s'effectue en dehors de ce bas monde. Al-Kirmānī sauve ainsi l'eschatologie ismaélienne, sans devoir adhérer à la forme de métempsycose qu'impliquait la notion du *baʿth* chez al-Sijistānī.

Et en effet, la dernière partie du chapitre est consacrée à une réfutation de la transmigration des âmes, qui reprend en grandes lignes les arguments développés dans le *Tanbīh al-hādī wa-l-mustahdī*[96].

IV. Conclusion

La transmigration des âmes était une notion problématique dans l'ismaélisme d'époque fatimide. Professée par les *ghulāt*, elle est impliquée par l'eschatologie ismaélienne qui soutient que l'âme ne peut se libérer du corps qu'en acquérant la gnose salvatrice révélée par le Qā'im lors de la clôture de notre présent « cycle d'occultation ». Accusés par leurs adversaires de professer la transmigration, les auteurs ismaéliens les plus marquants de cette époque, al-Sijistānī et al-Kirmānī, incluent dans leurs ouvrages de longues réfutations du *tanāsukh*. Ils rejettent la thèse gnostique que les âmes humaines sont descendues en ce bas monde suite

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[94] al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 387–388. Ce passage pourrait-être interprété, si on le comprend littéralement, comme se référant à la métamorphose (*maskh*) des damnés. Il rejoindrait alors la doctrine des Ṭayyibites qui se réclament ouvertement de l'autorité d'al-Kirmānī.

[95] al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 389–390, 395.

[96] al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* 395–397.

à une faute primordiale et qu'elles doivent se réincarner en des corps d'animaux afin d'expier cette faute. Al-Sijistānī, toutefois, admet une forme de métempsycose à l'intérieur de l'espèce humaine, liée à sa notion de *baʿth* : la renaissance continuelle des âmes jointe à la recréation continue de corps disposés à les accueillir. Al-Kirmānī, bien qu'adhérant aux principes de l'eschatologie ismaélienne établis par al-Sijistānī, refuse, pour sa part, toute forme de transmigration des âmes en ce monde. Selon son interprétation, le *baʿth*, avec les renaissances spirituelles et corporelles qu'il implique en attendant la *qiyāma*, s'opère dans le *barzakh*, un « macrocosme » situé aux confins du monde de la nature et du monde intelligible.

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PROMISED ONE (*MAWʿŪD*) OR IMAGINARY ONE (*MAWHŪM*)? SOME NOTES ON TWELVER SHĪʿĪ MAHDĪ DOCTRINE AND ITS DISCUSSION IN WRITINGS OF BAHĀʾ ALLĀH

Armin Eschraghi

Although the Bahāʾī Faith is generally referred to as an independent religion, its relationship with Islam is complex. The founder of the Bahāʾī Faith, Mīrzā Ḥusayn-ʿAlī Nūrī "Bahāʾ Allāh"[1] (b. 1817 in Tehran, d. 1892 near Akka), along with the vast majority of his early followers, was born and raised in an Islamic environment. Thus Islamic tradition, its concepts and its terminology are reflected in both the Sacred Writings of the founder as well as in apologetic tracts and hagiographies penned by his successors and followers. This also holds particularly true of Bābism, the predecessor movement out of which the Bahāʾī Faith grew. The vast literary output of its founder the Bāb (Sayyid ʿAlī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī, b. 1819 in Shīrāz, executed 1850 in Tabrīz)[2] during the first three years of his mission consists almost exclusively of Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* exegesis and prayers in the style of those attributed to the Twelve Imāms. Other treatises he wrote and indeed even his correspondence are heavily couched in the terminology of Shīʿī and particularly Shaykhī discourse.[3] A noticeable shift occurs in the second period (1847–1850)[4] of his mission. The Bāb now not only abrogates Islamic Law and supersedes it with a different one,[5] he even goes so far as to develop a new theology, cosmology, prophetology and eschatology, as well as a distinct set of rituals and a community structure,

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[1] The spelling Bahá'u'lláh is more common in literature on the Bahāʾī Faith, both academic and other. However, in compliance with editorial guidelines it has not been used here.

[2] Many of his writings remain unpublished and uncatalogued. For an overview of major works see MacEoin, *Sources*; Eschraghi, *Theologie*, Muhammad-Husainí, *Báb*, Saiedi, *Gate*.

[3] For details on the Shaykhī movement and the Bāb's relationship with it see Eschraghi, *Theologie*, and literature cited there.

[4] Given the fact that the Bāb's prophetic career lasted only six or seven years, before his life was extinguished in 1850 by a firing squad, it seems strange to speak of "early" and "later" Writings. Yet his writings reflect developments which took place at such fast pace that they do merit such a classification.

[5] For a discussion of some aspects of the Bāb's new *sharīʿa* as laid down in his major work *Bayān-i fārsī* (1847) and in the shorter *al-Bayān al-ʿarabī* and *Haykal al-dīn*, see Eschraghi, *Undermining*.

thus establishing a clear, and deliberate, break with Islam. Bābism hence played a vital role in the emergence of the Bahāʾī Faith as a post-Islamic religion.

In 1844 Bahāʾ Allāh became one of the first followers of the Bāb, and together with Fāṭima Baraghānī "Ṭāhira Qurratu-l-ʿAyn" (1814–1852) seems to have counted among the politically moderate yet theologically radical segment: he strictly rejected violence and any attempts aimed at usurping political power, yet supported the idea of fully advocating the Bāb's claim and establishing a clear break with Islam: an open provocation of the clergy.[6] Less than two decades later, in 1863, he claimed to fulfil the Bāb's prophecies about a new messianic figure ("*Man yuẓhiruhu Allāh*") and proclaimed himself to be the Promised One (*mawʿūd*) of all previous Dispensations. The Bahāʾī Faith, despite its obvious lack of defining characteristics such as antinomianism and apocalypticism, has often been described as a "messianic" or "Mahdist" movement, deeply rooted in Islam. Such a notion, though quite popular, seems to place undue emphasis on the earliest phase of its genesis and to ignore the vast corpus of Bahāʾ Allāh's writings produced over a period of roughly four decades.[7]

Bahāʾ Allāh initially engaged in esoteric and allegorical Qurʾānic exegesis and *ḥadīth* explanations, albeit to a much lesser extent than the Bāb did. Also, he drew mainly upon conventions of Ṣūfī literature and terminology rather than the sort of theological discourse which the Bāb primarily pursued. From roughly the 1860s onwards, however, the prominence of "Islamic" topics clearly diminishes in Bahāʾ Allāh's writings as he works towards founding a new religion and introduces distinct doctrines.[8]

Dogmatically, Bahāʾīs are not considered Muslims, not least because they deny a number of central Islamic doctrines, chief of which being the

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[6] Bahāʾ Allāh's eldest son ʿAbbās "ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ" (1844–1921), whose person and writings also play a major role in Bahāʾī theology, states that his father had been among those Bābīs who thought that "this Cause needs to be announced and made fully public (*bāyad iʿlān-i īn amr rā bi-tamāmih kard*)" *Muntakhabāt* iv, 16, 20 f.

[7] Bahāʾ Allāh is believed to have received his first revelation in the dungeon of Tehran in 1853, but not to have put forward any public claim until 1863. Since he had nevertheless written some of his major works during the period 1853–63, the duration of his prophetic career is generally given as roughly 40 years.

[8] Yet Qurʾānic metaphors remain an almost universal feature, although mostly in accordance with their Ṣūfī usage and literary conventions of the time. Bahāʾ Allāh's and ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ's letters to Zoroastrians or former Zoroastrian Bahāʾī converts form an exception. Examples can be found in the collections entitled *Yārān-i Pārsī*, Hofheim 1998, and *Tabernacle of Unity*, Haifa 2008, respectively.

avowed finality of Muḥammad's prophethood. Sociologically, however, many early Bahāʾīs might well be perceived as "Muslims" in the sense that, according to historical and autobiographical accounts, they often thought and behaved in an "Islamic" mindset. It was Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of Bahāʾ Allāh and head of the community from 1921 to 1957, who played an important role in the process of "de-islamification." He put an end to a number of the practices of the early believers which were a heritage of the Islamic milieu, and were not based on the teachings contained in Bahāʾ Allāh's writings. The Bahāʾī Faith subsequently became widely recognized as an independent world religion rather than a particular offshoot of Shīʿism, or of Islam in general. It should be noted that, unlike the case of other movements,[9] such a characterization fully corresponds with the self-perception of Bahāʾīs, insofar as they do not consider themselves Muslims.[10]

As can be gathered from these introductory comments, the relationship between Islam and the Bahāʾī Faith is complex and perceivable from different angles and within different frameworks. The question arises whether the break with Islam already originated with the Faith's founder himself, or whether it was at a later point, that it developed into an independent religion. This article is restricted to one particular topic, i.e., Bahāʾ Allāh's view on one of the most central features of Twelver Shīʿī theology, namely belief in the physical existence of a Twelfth Imām who has gone into occultation and who will rise one day as the Mahdī. We will then not only be able to draw conclusions on how Bahāʾ Allāh viewed the Faith he was born into, i.e. Twelver-Shīʿism, it will also shed new light on the question of whether the Bahāʾī Faith can be adequately described as a "Mahdist" movement, and if so, in what sense and to what extent the new religion deviates from its "predecessor," i.e. Twelver Shīʿism.

[9] In recent times the Ahmadis come to mind in this respect. They consider themselves Muslims but are not recognized as such by all other denominations. The situation is roughly comparable to the Mormons, who refer to themselves as Christians, whereas it is sometimes argued that they have deviated so far from the tenets of all other Christian groups that they should really be seen as a new religion, outside the fold of Christianity.

[10] In 1925 an Egyptian Court ruled that no Bahāʾī is permitted to marry a Muslim woman, on the grounds that he is not himself Muslim. This verdict was welcomed by Shoghi Effendi, then head of the Bahāʾī community, for it was perceived as an official recognition of the independent character of the new Faith. (*GPB* 365)

Occultation of the Twelfth Imam

In 260/873 the eleventh Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī died without leaving any male offspring, who could take his place as Imām.[11] The Shīʿī community faced its greatest crisis so far, and even traditional hagiography speaks of the period of "confusion" (*al-ḥayra*).[12] Al-ʿAskarī's brother Jaʿfar is said to have put forth a claim to the Imāmate that met with some support.[13] Others relied on statements attributed to al-ʿAskarī's aunt Ḥalīma (or according to some reports: Ḥakīma) to the effect that indeed a son named Muḥammad had been born under quite miraculous circumstances but had subsequently disappeared.[14] For a few decades (260–329/873–941) Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan allegedly communicated with his followers through a series of "emissaries" (*sufarāʾ, abwāb*),[15] but this period was followed by the "great occultation" (*al-ghayba al-kubrā*), during which all contact with the Imām was categorically denied.[16] He will arise as the Mahdī, bear a sword, render his oppressed community victorious over its enemies, and establish a reign of universal justice. Although such a notion initially met with serious doubts and criticism within the community,[17] it soon became official doctrine of the Twelver-Shīʿī creed.

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[11] According to Shīʿī sources, the Caliph arranged for the Imām's house to be sealed up and his wives and concubines placed under surveillance for one or two years in order to establish that he had left no son and that none of the women of his household had been pregnant at the time of his death. See for example al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn* 43 f.

[12] For a list of suggested solutions at the time see Momen, *Introduction* 59 ff.; Modarressi, *Crisis* 80 ff.

[13] Concerning Jaʿfar's role and his relationship with his brother Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī see Modarressi, *Crisis* 73 ff. The conflict within ʿAskarī's family seems to have revolved not only around spiritual authority, but also around matters of inheritance, *ibid.* 78 f.

[14] Jaʿfar, who vehemently denied that his brother had ever had a son, has subsequently been reviled as *al-kadhdhāb* ("liar"), an epithet that served to distinguish him from his ancestor and namesake, the Sixth Imām, Jaʿfar *al-Ṣādiq* ("the honest, truthful one"). *Kadhdhāb* can also be understood as an antonym to *ṣiddīq* (see for example Q 4:69; 57:19). Shīʿī sources accuse him of exhibiting all kinds of immoral behavior, of failing to observe obligatory prayer and of spending his time instead on learning magical practices, and of excessive imbibing. (See Modarressi, *Crisis* 74 f. and sources cited there.)

[15] Modern research suggests that the fact that there were precisely four *sufarāʾ* was, indeed, a projection of later hagiography. Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ Nawbakhtī was probably the initiator of this concept. (cf. Halm, *Die Schia* 43 f.; Momen, *Introduction* 164 f.) About Ibn Rūḥ cf. Arjomand, Ḥosayn ibn Ruḥ. Other *sufarāʾ* pretenders beside the four "canonical" ones are branded as liars in Shīʿī literature. See for example BA 51:367–381.

[16] BA 51:361.

[17] See Modarressi, *Crisis* 79 (n. 135).

This Twelfth Imām is believed by Shīʿites to be hidden from the eyes of friend and foe alike, yet physically present in this world, whose very existence depends on him.[18] Numerous stories are narrated concerning his dwelling-place, mostly describing mythological places such as "the green island", or a particular well in the Iraqi town of Sāmarrā.[19] Traditions are quite contradictory, starting with the alleged date of his birth.[20]

In certain respects the occultation of the Imām eventually proved to be a blessing in disguise, as problems with rival claims to the Imāmate, ambiguous and confusing regulations of succession, early deaths, and candidates who would prove unsuitable for the task, were now largely consigned to the past. The Hidden Imām became a target of projection for any and all concepts about the Imāmate which had evolved over the preceding two and half centuries.[21] He was to be the sole legitimate ruler of the whole of mankind; he would arise with his sword (*al-Qāʾim bi-l-sayf*) in order to restore justice; he would bring with him the unaltered version of the Qurʾānic text and several other items of mythological importance; and he would possess supernatural powers that would allow him to perform miracles. God would grant him an extraordinarily long life and permanent youth and strength. The Imām had become a superhuman being. Thus elevated to such an inaccessible rank, the Imām was at the same time far removed from his mortal followers.

The question of who would take his place until the unknown time of his re-appearance inevitably arose and, most importantly, which of the prerogatives of the Imām would be delegated to such a representative. The dogma of the Twelfth Imām is thus not merely a myth; it harbors important political implications. In letters allegedly written to the fourth and final emissary, the Imām had not only stressed that from now on whoever would lay claim to having met him in person was surely a liar and impostor (*kadhdhāb muftarī*), he also called on his community to direct their questions to "those who transmit our *ḥadīth*" (*ruwāt aḥādīthanā*), as they were to be considered "God's proof to you, as I am God's proof to

[18] Halm, *Die Schia* 41.

[19] Halm, *Die Schia* 41 f.; Momen, *Introduction* 161 f. In recent times folk belief regards a well near the Iranian city of Qom (Jamkarān) as his dwelling-place.

[20] It is traditionally celebrated on the 15th of Shaʿbān, but Modarressi points out numerous early sources that cite different months and even different years, *Crisis* 77 n. 123.

[21] For a detailed study of the Shīʿī concept of Mahdī according to traditional sources, see Sachedina, *Messianism*; see also Momen, *Introduction* 162 ff. A comprehensive compilation of traditions can be found in BA 51:343–366.

them."[22] The concept of "vicegerency" (*niyāba*) and thus the authority of the *'ulamā'* were derived from such statements.

The question remained, what exactly would fall in the sphere of these vicegerents: what their prerequisites were, whether certain duties such as declaring Holy War (*jihād*) and leading Friday congregational prayer were suspended during the Occultation, and whether and to whom payment of the "Imām's share" (*sahm-i Imām*) was to be made. Since Caliphs and Kings were generally seen as usurpers of the Imām's legitimate authority, it was debated whether cooperation with illegitimate rulers was permissible,[23] whether taxes should be paid to them, and whether a Shī'ī could even hold political power in anticipation of the re-appearance of the Imām. As Heinz Halm has put it, a whole history of Shī'ī theology could be written merely by looking at the various ideas which have been suggested as answers to this key question, right down to our present time.[24] Most traditional *'ulamā'* tended toward a quietist and apolitical reading, but more ambitious clerics have gradually succeeded in usurping, "one by one"[25] the prerogatives which technically belonged solely to the Hidden Imām.[26]

The Bāb as Mahdī (Qā'im)

When raising his own claim, Bahā' Allāh associated himself neither with the Mahdī nor with the Imāms. Bahā'ī discourse on the Mahdī is therefore centered not around the founder himself, but on his "Forerunner"

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[22] Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn* 484.

[23] Al-Karakī (16th cent.) was apparently among the first theologians who replied in the positive (cf. Halm, *Die Schia* 112 f.) Most earlier authors denied the permissibility of such action (quoted by Modarressi, *Crisis* 79 n. 130). Khomeini in his *Ḥukūmat-i Islāmī* argues in a similar vein. If a theft occurred it was not permissible to turn to worldly authorities. Even if one were successful in finding and securing the stolen goods, re-possession of such property was considered unlawful (*ḥarām*). The same, according to him, even applied to finding "*your own son's murderer*" (p. 84 f. of the Tehran edition (1364 H.Q.) "*taḥrīm-i dādkhwāhī az qudrathā-yi nā-rawā*").

[24] Halm, *Die Schia* 70.

[25] Halm, *Die Schia* 70; cf. Momen, *Introduction* 189 ff.

[26] For a detailed discussion of this process see Muḥsin Kadīwar, *Andīshi-yi siyāsī dar Islām*, Tehran, vol. 1 (1999[4]), vol. 2 (1998); Moussawi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Kuala Lumpur 1996); Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago 1984); Luṭfullāh Ājudānī, *'Ulamā' va inqilāb-i mashrūṭiyyat dar Īrān* (Tehran 2004). This development reached its peak with the Islamic Revolution in 1979. An "unislamic tyrant" (*ṭāghūt*) was overthrown, and what was virtually a *Gottkaiser* with unprecedented political and spiritual authority far surpassing even that of the disposed Shāh was put in his place.

(*mubashshir*),[27] the Bāb. It is thus necessary to initially deal with Bābism at some length, as it provides the basis for understanding Bahāʾ Allāh's statements on the topic.

The ambiguous and only gradually evolving nature of the Bāb's claim cannot be discussed here in detail.[28] It needs to be seen against the background of the terminology and doctrine both of Shīʿī and especially Shaykhī provenience and of the Bāb himself, but also within the broader context of his time and the religious and political importance of the concept of "vicegerency."[29] Although he seems initially to have claimed to be a representative of the Hidden Imām, he also identified himself with the Imām and eventually with a "divine manifestation" (*maẓhar-i ilāhī*), abrogating Islam and establishing a new Faith. But even with the initial claim of being a "mere" trustee of the Imām, from the very beginning the Bāb clearly embarked on a confrontation course with politically ambitious clerics. He wrote a number of letters to the Shāh and the *ʿulamāʾ* respectively. In these letters, claiming to speak with divine authority, he clearly challenged—or in their view, usurped—the *ʿulamāʾ*'s legitimacy. The king's authority, however, he declared legitimate.[30] It is not at all surprising that such a course of action met with hostility on behalf of the *ʿulamāʾ*. Naturally the Bāb's claim was a provocation to his Shīʿī environment, and it sparked heated debates. Apart from its political implications, it created serious problems with established tradition and put in question the literal meaning of authoritative texts, mainly the collections of *ḥadīth*. The fact that most prophecies were not fulfilled in their literal sense was the key argument of those Muslims who wrote polemical treatises against the new Faith. The Bāb in turn adopted an allegorical, or rather, esoteric interpretation of Qurʾān verses and *ḥadīth* prophecies. A few examples will serve to demonstrate how the Bāb treated traditional messianic expectations and how his concept of Mahdī differed from Twelver Shīʿī dogma.

Part of the Bāb's messianic project demanded minimizing the importance of tradition and of *ḥadīth* literature. A messenger of God, he argued,

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[27] *ESW* paragraphs 140, 231, 204, 205, 230.

[28] Cf. Eschraghi, *Studien*, and articles and sources cited there. Particularly crucial is the Shaykhī school of thought and the particular views on the Mahdī entertained by its two founding figures, Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1826) and Kāẓim al-Rashtī (d. 1843). These are omitted here because of restrictions of time and space. For a discussion of their views see Eschraghi, *Theologie*.

[29] Eschraghi, *Striking, Studien*; Lawson, *Gate and Remembrance*; Lambden, *Sinai Motifs*.

[30] For a study of these letters see the present author's forthcoming paper The Mahdi and the King, Some Notes on the Bāb's Attitude towards Religious and Worldly Authority.

was to be judged above all by his ability to reveal divine verses.[31] This was, after all, the greatest proof of the truth of Muḥammad. Indeed there is hardly a work by the Bāb that does not draw on this argument of superiority of divine verses over reports and traditions. Had the people clung to "the book of God" rather than to narrations, he avowed, they would have found it easier to recognize the truth of his message.[32]

In an early *ḥadīth* commentary written for Yaḥyā Dārābī[33] the Bāb began by criticizing speculations on the date of the Mahdī's appearance (*tawqīt*).[34] He stated that such endeavors were tantamount to attempting to limit God's omnipotence. Mortal men were not to insist on literal fulfilment of such prophecies, even if they had a basis in Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. God was after all wholly unrestrained, and not bound by earlier statements and reports, which could always become subject to abrogation.[35] All predications about the Promised One, he stressed, revolved around this Qur'ānic verse: *God abrogates and confirms whatever He will, and with Him is the Motherbook (Q 13:39)*.[36]

A general scepticism towards *ḥadīth* literature can clearly be sensed from many of the Bāb's explications. In a letter written in Mākū he stated that reports about the Mahdī were so contradictory that it was difficult to find even two that correspond to each other. Yet he stopped short of declaring them irrelevant altogether. Rather he explained that they stood in need of divinely inspired interpretation. By drawing on already existing terminology he called them the "*silent Book" (al-kitāb al-ṣāmit)*, whereas he was by contrast the superior, "*speaking Book" (al-kitāb al-nāṭiq)*.[37] The Bāb not only offered unorthodox interpretations of texts, he also seems to have entertained a certain proclivity for non-canonical traditions,[38] another possible expression of defiance of established "orthodoxy." In any

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[31] For references and a discussion of the Bāb's *i'jāz*-argument see Eschraghi, *Theologie* 134 ff.

[32] Cf. *Bayān-i fārsī* 6:8.

[33] He was the son of the influential cleric Ja'far Dārābī "Kashfi," author of *Tuhfatu-l-mulūk*.

[34] Here he quotes canonical *ḥadīth* literature to stress his point, e.g. Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* 1:368 (*bāb karāhiyyat al-tawqīt*) Similar reports are quoted by Aḥsā'ī, *Kitāb al-raj'a* 89 ff., yet later in the same work he quotes a *ḥadīth* narrated by Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar that contains speculation about the appearance of the Qā'im. *ibid.* 153 ff.

[35] Consequently, the concept of *badā'* (roughly: alteration of divine Will) was confirmed by him in the above sense. *Bayān-i fārsī* 4:3.

[36] Bāb, *Sharḥ ḥadīth Abī Labīd* 14.

[37] Bāb, *Tawqī' li-Asad* 182 f.

[38] Cf. Eschraghi, *Theologie* 151, 154 f. Bahā' Allāh also often quotes non-canonical *ḥadīth*s. Cf. *ESW* para. 70 f. 167; *KI* para. 266.

case, the tension between loyalty towards the existing tradition on one hand and provocation and innovation on the other is a recurring feature in his writings.

Although he devoted a large bulk of his vast literary output to discussion about fulfilment of prophecies, he was nevertheless at pains to stress that they were only adduced as proof for those who had not as yet reached the state of spiritual maturity.[39] Every messenger of God, he stated, had to deal with people who were so devoted to their previous Faith that they had become blind to any new revelation. Therefore, according to the Báb, all prophets had recourse to existing terminology and titles when announcing their own claim, so they could be understood by their contemporaries.[40] One may conclude from the Báb's explications that tradition could apparently not be easily done away with and he sought a way to bring it into accordance with his own message.

The role ascribed by the Báb to the Mahdī was a significant deviation from tradition. One major issue raised in contemporary polemics concerned the Báb's unwillingness to conduct Holy War (*jihād*).[41] The Shīʿī Mahdī is believed to take revenge for the wronged Imāms and their oppressed followers and destroy all rival denominations. The Báb, accordingly, in two of his earliest writings evoked the militant connotations of Shīʿī apocalypticism as part of his "eschaton fulfilled" discourse and implied that the time for *jihād* had come.[42] But when a group of his followers actually gathered in Karbalā, apparently prepared to wage the apocalyptic battle, he refused to join them. Oddly enough, the reason he gave for changing his travel plans was fear that bloodshed might occur and that he had to ensure that "not a single hair on anybody's head would be harmed."[43] Many disappointed believers abandoned him at this time as a consequence. Yet the Báb seems to have willingly accepted such a cost and to have made clear that he was not going to be the promised One that

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[39] Cf. *Dalāʾil-i sabʿa* 55 ff., *Tawqīʿ li-Asad*, S. 182 f. Bahāʾ Allāh in his early works made similar statements, cf. *KI* para. 266: "As the people differ in their understanding and station, We will accordingly make mention of a few traditions, that these may impart constancy to the wavering soul (*anfus-i mutazalzila*), and tranquillity to the troubled mind (*ʿuqūl-i muḍṭariba*)." Cf. *Lawḥ-i sarrāj* (quoted in *MA* 7:12 f., see also 94, 99, 207, 210); *Ishr* 93, 96, 269; *AQA* 6:161.

[40] *Bayān-i fārsī* 8:2.

[41] A typical example of this argument is found in Abū Ṭālib Shīrāzī's polemic, *Asrār al-ʿaqāʾid* ii, 84–104.

[42] See Eschraghi, *Theologie*, for references from two early works, *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* and *Kitāb al-rūḥ*.

[43] *Tawqīʿ li-Mullā ʿAbdu-l-Khāliq Yazdī* 184.

most people were expecting. His Mahdism thus became "de-militarized" at the earliest stage. The addressee of his *al-Risāla al-Dhahabiyya* had apparently found fault with this very fact and pointed out that according to tradition the Mahdī was to show signs of overwhelming strength and might (*mā yaʿjizu l-nās ʿanhu*).[44] This implied miracles, to be sure, but it mainly meant fighting the infidels with the sword.[45] The Bāb, however, replied that the true power of the Mahdī lay in his words.

The Twelver Shīʿī Qā'im is traditionally believed to render Islam victorious over all other Faiths, literally establishing "God's kingdom on earth." It is not expected that he would abrogate the Islamic *sharīʿa*, let alone establish a new one.[46] Bābism, unlike messianic or millenarian movements, who are often considered antinomian, in contrast includes a whole new set of laws. In early works the Bāb confirmed the *sharīʿa* of Muḥammad, although he already claimed authority to abrogate it.[47] He also quoted canonical *ḥadīth* stating that the Mahdī would *"appear with a new Cause and a new book (bi-amr jadīd wa kitāb jadīd)."*[48] Eventually, when in 1847 he made explicit his claim to be the Mahdī himself and not a mere emissary, the Bāb wrote his major work, *Bayān-i Fārsī*, and laid down his new *sharīʿa*, abrogating the Islamic one. He saw the Mahdī conversely not as the end of history but rather as the inaugurator of a new cycle in religious history, bearer of a new revelation from God.

However, at the very heart of the controversy was the physical existence of the Twelfth Imām. The Bāb seems never to have explicitly denied the doctrine of his corporeality, yet it follows from his explications that he did not endorse it. Although in early works he expressed seemingly orthodox views about the topic, there was no longer a place for belief in

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44 *al-Risāla al-dhahabiyya* 84 f.

45 Shīʿī *ḥadīth* literature is replete with militant statements about the Mahdī "His task will be but to kill, and he will not call for, nor accept anyone's repentance." Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba* 231, 233, 235, BA lii, 353 f. "God sent Muḥammad as a token of His mercy (*raḥma*), but He will send the Qā'im to take revenge (*naqma*)." BA lii, 230, 248. The particularly bloodthirsty and vengeful features of Shīʿī as well as Christian and Jewish messianic expectation may be accredited to the fact that they were all written at times when the respective communities experienced periods of repression.

46 Thus it is stated in a *ḥadīth* contained in Sunnī and Shīʿī collections: "Whatever Muḥammad has declared lawful shall remain lawful until Judgement Day, and whatever he has made unlawful shall remain unlawful until Judgement Day. Naught else will be, and naught else shall come (*lā yakūnu ghayruhu wa lā yajīʾu ghayruhu*)." Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* i, 58.

47 *Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar*, 229.

48 Cf. *Risāla fī ithbāt al-nubuwwa al-khāṣṣa*, lines 327–333. The *ḥadīth* itself is reported in Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba* 233; BA lii, 230, 354. In the latter source the text reads: "*bi-amrin jadīd wa kitābin jadīd wa sunnatin jadīda wa qaḍāʾin jadīd.*"

the physical existence of a Twelfth Imām[49] after he issued his explicit claim to Mahdī-hood, i.e., at the latest from 1847 on.[50] The Bāb, Sayyid ʿAlī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī, was obviously not born a millenium earlier in Iraq. How, then, could he be considered the Mahdī, and if so, what had happened to Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the Twelfth Imām who was believed to have gone into occultation?[51] The Bāb replied that the divine logos, the "Primal Will" (*mashiyyat-i awwaliyya*), was the true essence which manifested itself in all divine prophets. The inner reality of these "manifestations" (*maẓāhir*) was not bound to their mortal bodies, which they could dispose of at any time.[52]

The obvious political implications of the Bāb's claim to be the Mahdī cannot be overrated. His stance was clearly anti-clerical, and in the power struggle between clerics and the Court he clearly sided with the latter, despite heavy criticism aimed at the king and several statesmen. He did not claim political power for himself, but rather declared his kingdom to be not of this world. The Shāh was to remain on his throne but should observe justice.[53] The Bāb used his charisma as Mahdī not to usurp power, but to legitimize and strengthen the state. Like other reformers of the late 19th century he might have felt the need for a strong state whose reform efforts were not obstructed by over-ambitious clerics. Through laying claim to ultimate authority, he undermined clerical power and at

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[49] The integrity of the four emissaries (*sufarāʾ*) seems never to have been questioned by the Bāb (*Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar* 146 ff.), although skepticism is implicit in his Mahdī-doctrine, given the fact that they would have been emissaries of a non-existent entity. The more surprising it is that he should name them among the "Letters of the Qurʾānic dispensation," who had now returned in essence as the "Letters [an honorific title in the Bāb's terminology] of the Bayān." (*Bayān-i fārsī* 1:16–19) It is difficult to determine if and to what extent he used the *sufarāʾ* as part of his "eschaton fulfilled" discourse. Return of the Imāms and their trustees is a key element of Shīʿī expectation. Also, his own cosmology, based on the number nineteen and its universal manifestation on all levels of creation, might have played a role. Muḥammad, Fāṭima, the twelve Imāms, and the "four emissaries," together with the "Primal Point" (a title used by the Bāb for himself and in general for all Major Prophets) were the nineteen "Letters" of Islam. The Bāb was possibly speaking about his own community, rather than expressing his views on the past.

[50] The best known early work of the Bāb devoted to the topic is *Tafsīr sūrat al-Kawthar*, see especially 146 ff.

[51] A collection of arguments against the Bāb's claim from the perspective of Usūlī Twelver Shīʿism is found in Shīrāzī, *Asrār al-ʿaqāʾid*, ii, 26–83, 105–134. He states that the Qāʾim was by now well over a thousand years old and would appear in the very body that he was born with. The Muslim theologian and Bahāʾī convert Abū-l-Faḍl Gulpāygānī (d. 1919) formulated an apologetical response to such views, *Farāʾid* 56 ff.

[52] *Tawqīʿ li-Asad* 180 f. cf. *Tawqīʿ li-Mullā Aḥmad* 197; *Tafsīr āyat an-Nūr* 161.

[53] This is clear from several letters he wrote to Muḥammad-Shāh and to Ḥājī Mīrzā Āghāsī, partly published in Afnān, *ʿAhd-i aʿlā* 102 f., 262, 279 ff., 299 ff., 354 f.

the same time lent support and legitimacy to state institutions. However, only few statesmen, and probably by far not even all Bābīs, seem to have recognized this effect. Ironically, several groups of Bābīs became caught up in fighting with government troops, and thus ultimately the state, acting under the impression of facing yet another rival contender for power, initiated a devastating crackdown on a movement that could have proven to be a strong ally against the clerical establishment.

In any case, a close study of his major works suggests that the Bāb initially drew on existing concepts and terminology, so that his immediate addressees could relate to his message. But in light of the fact that he went on to preach a whole new doctrine, quite different not only from Shīʿism but from Islam in general it would seem erroneous to classify Bābism as a Shīʿī reform movement.

The Twelfth Imam in Bahāʾ Allāh's Earliest Writings (1850s–60s)

The dichotomy between the Bāb's claim on the one hand and the Twelver Shīʿī messianic expectation on the other was addressed by Bahāʾ Allāh in early writings. During his exile in Baghdad (1853–63), a few years before he would first announce his own mission, he wrote apologetic tracts arguing for the truth of the Bāb's message whilst preparing the Bābī followers for hearing his own claim. Two important works stem from this period, *Jawāhiru-l-Asrār* (late 1850s) and *Kitāb-i Īqān* (ca. 1861). In these works he dealt with the Imām's return specifically and with prophecies, eschatology and apocalypticism in general. Like the Bāb before him, he suggested an allegorical reading of relevant Qurʾān verses and *ḥadīth* literature. Moreover, he added a strong rationalist element to his discourse, occasionally couched in mild sarcasm.

> All that thou hast heard regarding Muḥammad the son of Ḥasan [the Mahdī]—may the souls of all that are immersed in the oceans of the spirit be offered up for His sake—is true beyond the shadow of a doubt, and we all verily bear allegiance unto Him. But the Imáms of the Faith have fixed His abode in the city of Jábulqá, which they have depicted in strange and marvellous signs.[54] To interpret this city according to the literal meaning of the tradition would indeed prove impossible, nor can such a city ever be found.

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[54] For *ḥadīth* sources on this belief see Ghaemmaghami, *Seeing the Proof: The Question of Encountering the Hidden Imam in Early Imamī Shīʿī Islam* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto 2012).

> Wert thou to search the uttermost corners of the earth, nay probe its length and breadth for as long as God's eternity hath lasted and His sovereignty will endure, thou wouldst never find a city such as they have described, for the entirety of the earth could neither contain nor encompass it. If thou wouldst lead Me unto this city, I could assuredly lead thee unto this holy Being, Whom the people have conceived according to what they possess and not to that which pertaineth unto Him! Since this is not in thy power, thou hast no recourse but to interpret symbolically the accounts and traditions that have been reported from these luminous souls. And, as such an interpretation is needed for the traditions pertaining to the aforementioned city, so too is it required for this holy Being.[55]

According to his allegorical interpretation the inner reality of all divine messengers originated in a higher sphere regardless of their physical state.[56] Already at this early stage it became patently clear that Bahāʾ Allāh did not believe in the Twelfth Imām's continued presence and in his having been endowed with an extraordinarily long life, however he still stopped short of explicitly denying his very existence. Despite his conciliatory tone and overall approach, in a few instances he nevertheless sharply criticized popular belief and common conceptions about the Mahdī.[57]

The allegorical interpretation of all things pertaining to the Mahdī, already introduced by the Bāb and now further elaborated by Bahāʾ Allāh, made it possible to bridge the obvious gap between Shīʿī expectancy on one hand and Bābi doctrine on the other. The Bāb was the "true Mahdī," as opposed to the one based on false perceptions and misunderstandings by Shīʿī theologians. In *The Book of Certitude (Kitāb-i Īqān)*, Bahāʾ Allāh expanded on this view:

> They confidently assert that such traditions as indicate the advent of the expected Qá'im have not yet been fulfilled, whilst they themselves have failed to inhale the fragrance of the meaning of these traditions [...T]hese foolish divines wait expecting to witness the signs foretold. Say, O ye foolish ones! Wait ye even as those before you are waiting![58]

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[55] *JA* para. 48.

[56] Cf. *ibid.* para. 49. 'Abdul-Bahā' stated that the Twelfth Imām never existed in the physical world, but that he, "from the very beginning, dwelled in the sphere of occultation" (quoted in Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 833 f.). In another letter he pointed out the obvious contradictions in early Shīʿī conceptions about the Twelfth Imām and noted that he must have "possessed a spiritual reality in a higher realm (*malakūt*)" (letter quoted in *MA* ii, 51 f.)

[57] Cf. *JA* para. 73.

[58] *KI* para. 90. Cf. *Lawḥ-i istinṭāq* (quoted in *MA* iv, 254 f.)

Confirming the Bāb's views, Bahā' Allāh further transformed the militant and political component of Twelver Shī'ī messianism into their opposite: The Mahdī's kingdom would not be of this world, a clear rejection of the triumphalist and often violent character of apocalyptic prophecies. The sovereignty of the Qā'im was "not the sovereignty which the minds of men have falsely imagined." It was rather "the spiritual ascendancy [*iḥāṭa-yi bāṭiniyya*] which He exerciseth to the fullest degree over all that is in heaven and on earth."[59] Whilst according to most canonical *ḥadīth* texts the Qā'im will shed the blood of all enemies of Islam and render the true Faith of Muḥammad victorious (*yaqtulu n-nāsa ḥattā lā yabqā illā dīnu Muḥammad*),[60] Bahā' Allāh spoke of a Mahdī who would not only abstain from all violence, but actually announce new laws and a new Faith.[61] Like the Bāb he pointed out the inconsistencies of traditional expectation by quoting several *ḥadīth*s about the ordeals the Qā'im and his companions would encounter at the time of his appearance. Bahā' Allāh adduced them as proof that the Mahdī's appearance would be a provocation rather than a confirmation of existing norms.[62]

Later Writings of Bahā' Allāh (1870's to 1892)

As a consequence, when in April 1863, Bahā' Allāh announced his claim to be the "Divine Manifestation" promised by the Bāb, he began his call by proclaiming "the abolishment of the sword" (*irtifā'-i ḥukm-i sayf, maḥw-i ḥukm-i jihād*),[63] thus effectively de-militarizing Messianism. At the same time he claimed that all prophecies of the past had now been fulfilled. While other messengers of God were to appear in the future, he asserted that the first of these would not come before another 1000 years had elapsed.[64] Thus, Bahā' Allāh, unlike the Bāb, rather than raising new short-term eschatological expectations ("*Naherwartung*"), went so far as to effectively abolish the notion that salvation depended in a savior

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[59] *KI* para. 113, 114.

[60] Cf. *BA* lii, 390.

[61] 'Abdu-l-Bahā' likewise lamented that "men await a blood-thirsty saviour" who will "turn children into orphans, women into widows." Whereas in contrast every divine messenger should be a "manifestation of spiritual perfection, the dawning-place of the light of God's compassion". He is supposed "to give life, not take it and to become the cause of life, not death, to build up and not to destroy." (*MA* v, 38).

[62] *KI* para. 273.

[63] *TB* para. 3:4, 7:27, Cf. *MA* viii, 64 f.

[64] Cf. *MA* viii, 64 f., *KA* para 37.

whose appearance was imminent. Nevertheless, from 1863 onwards, the topic of the Twelfth Imām retained a certain importance in Bahāʾ Allāh's writings, though from a quite different, more radical angle. He now largely abstained from applying allegorical exegesis to *ḥadīth* literature.[65] Instead, he explicitly denied that a Twelfth Imām had ever existed, and he severely criticized this dogma as an example how man-made beliefs were abused on account of ulterior motives.

Bahāʾ Allāh now openly displayed his scepticism towards *ḥadīth* literature. His initial conciliatory approach, attempting to harmonize tradition with the new Faith through allegorical interpretation, was henceforth replaced by calling into doubt or outrightly denying the authenticity of these *ḥadīth*s. Ironically, Muslims who traditionally charged Jews and Christians with tampering with their respective Scriptures now faced the same accusation. The traditions about the Qāʾim, Bahāʾ Allāh asserted, were "all devoid of truth" (*kull az ṣidq ʿārī*).[66] Although many such *ḥadīth*s had been handed down in numerous ways *(bi tawātur*), they were nevertheless proven to be spurious, as the Bāb's appearance occurred in a manner contrary to these traditions.[67] If people were to cling to "vain imaginings and to narrations (*awhāmāt wa ẓunūnāt wa riwāyāt*)" they would surely perish like past generations.[68]

For 1200 years, he wrote, the *ʿulamāʾ* had transmitted traditions, yet they were "ignorant of the true nature of even one of the signs of His coming."[69] Had they clung to the text of the Book of God, he asserted, they would not have been led away from the truth.[70] Muḥammad had never claimed any other proof than revelation of divine verses. But when after Muḥammad's death the reigns of authority had fallen into the hands of the *ʿulamāʾ*, these "prevented the people from obtaining true knowledge about the verses of God," laying claim to exclusive access to their true

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[65] Qurʾānic and Biblical verses were indeed quite often quoted and interpreted by him, but now as alluding to himself. Cf. *ESW* para. 170, 192, 207 ff.

[66] Letter quoted in: Raʾfatī, *Ārāʾ-i Ibn ʿArabī*, 155.

[67] *Iqt* 269, 244 f., 265; cf. *MA* iv, 170 f.

[68] *MA* vii, 187; cf. i, 78 f.

[69] *MA* iv, 171, cf. *Āyāt-i Ilāhī* ii, 32, 271. See also the Bāb's lamentation that "not a single one of the Shīʿites" had understood the true meaning of "Judgement Day". *Bayān-i Fārsī* 2:7.

[70] The Bāb had already expressed this thought in his *Bayān-i Fārsī* (6:8). Criticism of *ḥadīth* literature about the Mahdī can also be found in ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ's writings. He wondered why the Learned had failed to understand the clear prophecies concerning the encounter with God (*liqāʾ Allāh*) in the Qurʾān, and instead clung to "highly dubious traditions". *MA* ii, 51 f.

meaning. All verses concerning Resurrection, Judgement Day etc. were thereafter "interpreted by them in accordance with their own desires," and the ignorant masses blindly followed them.[71]

In a letter to one of his followers he revised the classical narrative and explained the "true course of events" after the death of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. According to him, "the stories of old" (*qaṣaṣ-i ūlā*) had veiled men from the truth, these being unable to perceive that what they had heard was nothing but smoke and mirrors (*kidhb-i ṣirf wa ifk-i maḥḍ*). He went on to cite the fate of the Eleventh Imām's brother Jaʿfar: When asked whether his late brother had any male offspring, he replied that al-ʿAskarī's only son had died as an infant. This sparked the hostility of the "manifestations of falsehood" (*hayākil-i majʿūla, nufūs-i majʿūla-yi kadhaba*), who "ever since reviled him as 'the liar' (*kadhdhāb*)." Bahāʾ Allāh, in contrast, named him "the truthful one" (*ṣādiq*) and branded his enemies as "pharaonic souls"[72] who acted out of mere self-interest.[73]

We do not know whether it was Bahāʾ Allāh's aim to clarify historical facts or merely to challenge Shīʿī hagiography and dogma. In any case, the rehabilitation of a figure as detested by Shīʿites as Jaʿfar "al-Kadhdhāb" was a clear provocation. He furthermore reversed the traditional roles of protagonists by casting doubt on the key witness of the Imām's birth, the aunt of the Eleventh Imām. As opposed to Shīʿī tradition he referred to Jaʿfar as "that wronged one" (*ān maẓlūm*), and in turn conferred the title "liar" on the latter's aunt (*ān zan-i kādhiba*).[74] In a similar vein, the emissaries of the Twelfth Imām (*abwāb-i arbaʿa*) were branded "dawning-places of falsehood" (*maṭāliʿ-i kidhb*), and they were charged not only with having led their own contemporaries astray, but indeed with the ultimate responsibility for the martyrdom of the Bāb, who had fallen victim to the misguided beliefs of his countrymen.[75] Bahāʾ Allāh particularly singled out the third emissary, Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ. Since prophethood had been sealed

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[71] *KB* 169 f.

[72] *MA* viii, 101 f. The full text of the letter can be found in *INBA* vii, 251–295. See also: Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 817.

[73] *Letter to Āqā Mīrzā Afnān* in: *MA* i, 7. Abū-l-Faḍl Gulpāygānī took it upon himself to demonstrate the weak grounds on which belief in the Twelfth Imām was founded. (*al-Farāʾid* 118).

[74] *MA* i, 7. He also emphasized the fact that Jaʿfar had after all been born to an Imām and was the brother of an Imām, implying that he was thereby no less an authority than his aunt (Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 817).

[75] *Letter to Warqāʾ* in *MA* iv, 140, cf. *ESW* para. 173: "*How many the edifices which they reared with the hands of idle fancies and vain imaginings, and how numerous the cities which they built! At length those vain imaginings were converted into bullets and aimed at Him Who*

with Muḥammad, he stated, and now "God Himself was revealed in His sovereignty" (*ẓahara Allāh bi-sulṭānihi*), it was entirely unsuitable to argue with words attributed to the Imāms, let alone those of their emissaries such as Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ. Even more so since, according to Bahāʾ Allāh, it was the latter's narrations that had become "as a veil between the people of the Quran" (*malaʾ al-furqān*) and "God's Manifestation."[76]

In a similar vein, Bahāʾ Allāh rehabilitated yet another controversial character: ʿAbd Allāh al-Shalmaghānī, who was an opponent of Ibn Rūḥ and who died as a result of the conflict between the two. It is difficult to reconstruct the actual substance of that conflict on account of the hostility and one-sidedness of the sources, which strongly revile Shalmaghānī and generally attribute all sorts of vices to him. Whatever the case, once again it seems that Bahāʾ Allāh was not so much concerned with the actual historical facts as he was with challenging the traditional Shīʿī narrative.[77] Thus Shalmaghānī, like Jaʿfar, was credited with denying physical existence of the Twelfth Imām and with the conviction that the Mahdī would be born in the future.[78] In this spirit Bahāʾ Allāh concurred with the findings of the Bahāʾī writer Abū-l-Faḍl Gulpāygānī (d. 1919), who had studied poems attributed to Shalmaghānī and had concluded that they pointed to the belief that the Promised One would rise "from amongst the Persians."

Whatever their historical role might have been, "Jaʿfar" and "Shalmaghānī" stood as symbols for those who were unwilling to sacrifice the truth and thereby suffered oppression. Their adversaries, in Bahāʾ Allāh's narrative, were represented by Ibn Rūḥ, the *sufarāʾ*, Ḥakīma and other "leaders." These sought to impose their particular views on others and were guided by ulterior motives. Whenever a "truly wise one (*ʿālim-i ḥaqīqī wa ʿārif-i maʿnawī*)" denied the physical existence of the Imām he was "struck down with the sword of hate and enmity." "Men wearing white and green turbans" posed in their stead as possessors of wisdom and knowledge,

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is the Prince of the world. Not one single soul among the leaders of that sect [the Shīʿites] acknowledged Him in the Day of His Revelation!"

[76] *MA* i, 60.

[77] Some of these verses are quoted in Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 815, 835.

[78] Quoted in: Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-āthār* ii, 8. f. ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ, too, stated that Shalmaghānī had testified to the fact "that the light will appear from the Persian horizon (*min al-ufuqi l-īrānī*)" but that it had been opposed by the "abject and foolish" who "shed his blood and killed him, thus committing a grave injustice." God however had bestowed upon him "everlasting grace and bounty," absolved him of all libel and sheltered him "in His eternal kingdom." (*MA* ii, 32).

thereby preventing the Religion of Muḥammad to exercise its influence (*bāb-i sharīʿat-i Rasūlullāh rā masdūd kardand*).[79]

In the last consequence, Bahāʾ Allāh's words were obviously aimed at the very fundament of Shīʿī cleriocracy—an institution which according to him was not only based on a lie (namely existence of "an imaginary figure, placed on an imaginary throne, established through forged letters and traditions"), but one which had been imposed on the Shīʿī believers partly through deception and partly through the suppression of opposing views, and even by means of violence ("they issued death verdicts"[80] and "shed the blood of the Exalted Lord [the Bāb] and many noble men"), with the ultimate aim of consolidating authority for the "chiefs" (*ruʾasāʾ*).[81] Their referring to the hidden Imām and claiming to act in his name was, to Bahāʾ Allāh, a smoke screen. In truth it served the agenda only of those leaders who wanted to extend their own power and influence ("inwardly they longed for their own exaltation, but outwardly they pointed to the Holy Precincts"). He castigated the members of the cleriocracy as "false and treacherous souls" who outwardly clothed themselves with the "garment of piety and saintliness (*zuhd-u-waraʿ*)."[82] Already in the early days of Islam they had approached the believers wearing "shabby clothes" to show their detachment of worldly affairs, bowing their heads in "feigned humility" to gain the trust of the "poor and helpless people (*nās-i bīchāra*)," who were not aware of their "malice" (*tazwīrāt*), and feeding them "a few fabricated traditions."[83] Even followers of the Shaykhiyya, whose two founding figures Bahāʾ Allāh highly lauded,[84] became subject to his criticism, as they had "formed with the hands of idle fancies a body of vain imagination and named it 'Fourth Support'."[85]

Bahāʾ Allāh's letter to Golpāygānī quoted above is relevant to our topic in another respect as well. Gulpāygānī was puzzled as to why in his early writings the Bāb would so strongly revile Shalmaghānī and testify to the truth of the four emissaries, entirely in accordance with Shīʿī tradition.[86]

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79 Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 817.
80 *Iqt* 244 f.
81 *MA* vii, 186 f.
82 *Iqt* 267 f.
83 *MA* iv, 169.
84 *ESW* para. 174; *MA* i, 21 f., *KI* para. 72.
85 *Laʾālī al-ḥikma* iii, 294; cf. i, 141; *AQA* vi, 160.
86 For Gulpāygānī's letter see Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Muḥāḍarāt* 839 ff. For the Bāb's statements see *Tafsīr sūrat al-Kawthar* 146 ff., partly quoted in: Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-āthār* ii, 7 f.

Bahāʾ Allāh replied that the Bāb in the first years had to exercise great restraint in expressing his true claim because of the fact that his addressees were so deeply rooted in tradition. The Bāb had only spoken such words "that the veils of vain imaginings may be torn apart." In other words, he spoke outwardly in a manner familiar to his contemporaries, so they might more easily relate to his ideas. In the beginning of the Bāb's mission people had not yet been ready to hear his message, and he was obliged to utter words in accordance with their limited perception.[87] This approach, Bahāʾ Allāh pointed out on a different occasion, even involved the Bāb's lowering his own claim to that of "Gatehood" (*bābiyyat*), albeit "that station, the one above it, and the one even above, have all been created by a mere movement of his finger."[88]

The significance of such statements for the Bahāʾī view on the Mahdī can hardly be overestimated. The Bāb's very claim to be the Mahdī was transformed into a messianic secret ("*Messiasgeheimnis*"), an expression of wisdom (*ḥikma*) or, to use a Shīʿī term, dissimulation (*taqiyya*). The Bāb's true identity was not that of the "Mahdī"; on the contrary, such a claim was interpreted by Bahāʾ Allāh as a mere concession to tradition and to the norms of the Bāb's immediate environment. In other words, the Mahdī's significance and rank was clearly downgraded by him. The Mahdī was no longer the highest authority, the pivot of the universe around which all religious and political discourse was centered, but rather a relic from former times; and the use of his title was merely a pragmatic (or didactic) and above all temporary step to prepare people for the true message.[89]

Often he warned his followers against their contemporaries' blind fanaticism and the possible consequences of openly challenging their "vain imaginings." If anyone were to deviate even slightly from prevailing dogmas (*ḥudūd-i kalāmiyya*), the *ʿulamāʾ* would declare him a non-believer and oppose him with all their strength. It was thus "still impossible to announce to the people the true advent of the Qāʾim," as this announcement ran contrary to their wishes and expectations and would only have sparked hate and enmity.[90]

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[87] Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-āthār* ii, 8 f.

[88] *Laʾālī al-ḥikma* ii, 57, cf. 53, 60.

[89] This is in fact what Bahāʾ Allāh had already implied in his early work, cited above: "*Know then that all thou hast heard and witnessed that Daystar of Truth, the Primal Point [the Bāb], ascribe to Himself from the designations of former times is only on account of the weakness of men and the scheme of the world of creation*." *JA* para. 91.

[90] *INBA* viii, 321.

The Bahāʾī Faith and Twelver Shīʿism

Bahāʾ Allāh's harsh criticism not only of the Shīʿī clergy but also of many core beliefs of Shīʿism requires a new evaluation of his attitude towards that Faith.[91] He apparently never stated explicitly that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Imāms were the rightful successors to Muḥammad. Such a view could nevertheless be deduced from his occasional praise for the Imāms and his recourse to Shīʿī terminology and literature.[92] But it is noteworthy that condemnation of the first three Caliphs and similar sectarian characteristics of Shīʿī literature are entirely absent from Bahāʾ Allāh's writings. He was indeed hardly a staunch supporter of Shīʿism, and he actually shared many of the traditional criticisms Sunnīs hurl at Shīʿism. Among them was his strong antipathy toward *ghuluww* (extreme veneration of the Imāms), an attitude which according to his own testimony reached back to his early youth.[93] To him many Shīʿites, despite their explicit denial of the fact, engaged in "hidden, yet manifest idolatry" (*shirk-i khafī wa jalī*), by assigning to "those who have been created by a mere word of Muhammad" a "station equal, nay, higher than Him (*shibh-i ān ḥaḍrat balki fawq-i ān ḥaḍrat*)."[94]

Bahāʾ Allāh did not side with Sunnism in general, nor for that matter with Shīʿism. Rather, he observed the conflict between the two creeds as an outsider, confirming some of the respective tenets of both groups but

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[91] Sources are numerous; beside the ones already cited above, see for example *ESW* para. 184; *INBA* viii, 523 f., xviii, 172, 541 [= xxii, 42], xix, 98, xxvii, 427; *Ishr* 160, 221 f., 279; *Laʾālī al-ḥikma* i, 134, 169 f.; *MA* vii, 182.

[92] ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ speaks in one place of the second Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as "breaking the Covenant" of Muḥammad. (*Muntakhabāt* iv, 259–300) It needs to be kept in mind, though, that the text in question concerns the conflict with ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ's younger half-brother Muḥammad-ʿAlī, who tried to usurp leadership of the community. By resorting to the "prime catastrophe" of Shīʿī history, ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ evoked a powerful image in the minds of his contemporaries in order to scandalize his brother's misdeed.—Shoghi Effendi stated that among "the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold" was "the wholehearted and unqualified acceptance [...] of the divine origin of both Islám and Christianity, of the Prophetic functions of both Muhammad and Jesus Christ, of the legitimacy of the institution of the Imāmate, and of the primacy of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles." Cf. *PDC* 110. What exactly the institution of the Imāmate implied and whether Bahāʾ Allāh had viewed the Imāms as spiritual authorities or as political leaders remain open to investigation. It is quite clear, however, that his "Imāmology" (if the rare occasions where Bahāʾ Allāh ever spoke about the Imāms even deserve such a description) was not identical with that of Shīʿism, just as the recognition of Peter did not imply the adoption of the entire Catholic tradition.

[93] *Ishr* 38 f., *INBA* xviii, 316 f.

[94] *MA* iv, 171 f. Cf. vii, 46; *TB* para. 8:49 ff.; *Miṣr* 221 f.; *Laʾālī al-ḥikma* ii, 232; *MA* iv, 261.

neither creed in its entirety. The main point of criticism seems indeed to have been the concept of the living Mahdī. In this particular context Bahāʾ Allāh would at times break with his usual habit of not taking sides in age-old conflicts: "It was not the Sunnīs," he stated, who issued a death-verdict (*fatwā-yi qatl*) against the Bāb.[95] Also, he credited them for belief that the Mahdī would be born in the future, amongst the Persians.[96] The Shīʿites however had erred "since the beginning of Islam" in that they thought the Qāʾim had already been born and would appear "from the Jābulsā of vain imaginings."[97]

To Bahāʾ Allāh, belief in the Twelfth Imām and the resulting dogmas demonstrated how intrinsically absurd beliefs could become unchallengeable dogma. This tendency was due to human nature, which he saw as "more inclined (*rāghibtar*) towards superstition" and blind imitation.[98] Despite his rather strong condemnations, his criticism was generally levelled against certain teachings or against the spiritual leaders of Shīʿism, not however against the whole fold of believers.[99]

Bahāʾ Allāh's seemingly condemnatory statements about Shīʿism are typically made in the context of his debate with those remaining Bābīs who did not recognize his claim. What Bahāʾ Allāh originally characterized as misdeeds of Shīʿī leaders was often likened subsequently to the behavior of certain Bābīs. For example, he stated that the Bāb had suffered much to "destroy the idols of superstition," yet some, in his name, tried to burden the people with new "vain imaginings."[100] But a salient feature of most passages that address the topic is that they end with a warning addressed to his own followers not to imitate "past generations" by falling prey to erroneous beliefs or engaging in triumphalism and fanaticism. For 1200 years, he stated, Shīʿites had perceived of themselves as the best

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95 MA iv, 141.

96 INBA viii, 522 f.

97 INBA xviii, 172.

98 INBA viii, 524 See also KB 1.

99 *Āyāt-i Ilāhī* ii, 156; AQA v, 225; INBA xxvii, 427, xxviii, 443, xxxi, 60. ʿAbdu-l-Bahāʾ, acting as the appointed interpreter (*mubayyin*) of Bahāʾ Allāh's words, likewise emphasized that his father's hefty admonitions were aimed exclusively at those *ʿulamāʾ* who had shed the blood of many innocent souls, and that they "in no wise encompassed all those who followed ʿAlī and the Imāms." *Muntakhabāt* iv, 263. Bahāʾ Allāh did not wholly absolve the community of its responsibility, however: Although it was the Learned who first opposed the Bāb, from a different perspective it was the people who were the ultimate cause of this opposition. For had they not "depended on the confirmation or rejection (*radd-u-qabūl*) of the Learned," these would have "remained without following." *Miṣr* 185 f.

100 KB 165.

people (*bihtarīn-i aḥzāb*), the chosen and elect few (*firqa-yi nājiyya wa ummat-i marḥūma*). Yet on the Day of Reckoning they failed "the divine test" when they killed the Promised One. Unless one "gain knowledge about the lies that were prevalent in previous times," he concluded, one would "not be able to testify to the greatness of this Day." It was therefore vital to recognize the "dawning-places of idle fancies and vain imaginings" of "earlier and later days (*az qabl wa baʿd*)."[101] And with reference to the extreme veneration of the Imāms, he admonished his own followers: "*Beseech thou God, the True One, that He may graciously shield the followers of this Revelation from the idle fancies and corrupt imaginings of such as belong to the former Faith, and may not deprive them of the effulgent splendours of the day-star of true unity*."[102]

Shīʿism was, it seems, singled out particularly, because to him it served as a warning example of how things could go wrong when a new Faith was founded. Most passages quoted throughout this paper conclude with a similar warning to his followers. The "people of Bahā" should "ponder these matters (*īn umūr*)" and "break the idols of vain imaginings."[103] Bahāʾ Allāh expressed his "hope that the like of it would not come to pass" in his own community of believers.[104]

Conclusion

The relevance of the Mahdī-issue decreases over time and it becomes at best a side issue in Bahāʾ Allāh's voluminous post-1863 writings. Early references to the Qāʾim discourse are explained as a concession to the norms of the religious environment. But even in these early statements, we find a radical re-interpretation of the Mahdī-concept, doing away with its apocalyptic and militant aspects, thus differing significantly from traditional Shīʿī dogma. The Bahāʾī Faith can not be adequately described as a "Mahdist" movement, since the very concept of Mahdī has no place in its theology. It is often the case that heterodox groups are concerned about the same key topics as their mother tradition, but entertain "deviant" views about them. But in this case, the topics themselves have, after a short transition period, become irrelevant. To name but one example,

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101 AQA vi, 244. Cf. *ibid.* 161, 227, MA vii, 221.
102 *TB* viii, 51.
103 Iqt 269.
104 *Ishr* 39.

the Bahāʾī Faith does not hold a different Imāmology from Shīʿī groups; the Imāms are almost entirely absent from its Primary Writings and play no role in their belief system. This conclusion is further confirmed by the fact that even from a superficial reading of the major writings of Bahāʾ Allāh one does not gain the impression of a specifically "Shīʿī," as opposed to, say, Ṣūfī, creed.[105]

Beside apocalypticism and militancy, the third central feature of traditional Mahdī-concepts, namely the claim to political (via "divine") authority, was rejected by Bahāʾ Allāh. The political relevance of his (and the Bāb's) approach to the concept of Mahdī-hood becomes clear when considering that his immediate environment was 19th Century Qajar Iran. Denying the very existence of a Twelfth Imām was tantamount to shattering the foundation of the Uṣūlī Shīʿī hierarchy, whose legitimacy he called into doubt. Both the Bāb and Bahāʾ Allāh strongly criticized the monarchs and various government representatives for their injustices and corruption. But they did not deny the general legitimacy of state institutions and of a worldly king. On the contrary, they appealed to their "divine authority" to confirm it, the Bāb through claiming to be the Mahdī himself, Bahāʾ Allāh through rejecting his very existence. The religious authorities, the *ʿulamāʾ*, were to succumb to the state authorities rather than to oppose them. This measure was seen as a necessary step to end the long enduring struggle between religious and state authorities, which they saw as standing in the way of the country's development. In his last major work (1891), a lengthy letter to Muḥammad-Taqī Najafī, one of the most influential clerics of the late 19th century, Bahāʾ Allāh concluded: "*The divines must needs unite with His Majesty, the Sháh, and cleave unto that which will insure the protection, the security, the welfare and prosperity of men. A just king enjoyeth nearer access unto God than anyone.*"[106]

Quite notably, Bahāʾ Allāh declared all earlier prophecies "fulfilled," and did not raise new expectations. The next divine messenger was said to appear only after a long period of time ("not before a 1000 years have elapsed"). And even then, Bahāʾ Allāh did not inform his followers about apocalyptic signs which are to accompany this renewed theophany. Revenge fantasies, a salient feature of many forms of messianism and particularly of Mahdism, are consequently absent from Bahāʾ Allāh's vision of the future. He did promise his followers an ultimate triumph, yet these

[105] The same can to a large extent also be said about the post-1847 writings of the Bāb.
[106] *ESW* para. 145, cf. 199.

should not wait for divine intervention in the person of a redeemer or deliverer like the Mahdī. The Bahā'ī Faith could thus more accurately be described as a "de-messianized" religion, rather than a "messianist movement."

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List of Abbreviations

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BA = Majlisī, M.B.: *Biḥār al-anwār*, 110 vols., Beirut 1984.
ESW = Bahā' Allāh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette (Illinois) 1988.
GPB = Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, Wilmette (Illinois) 1995[4].
INBA = Iran National Bahā'ī Archives Manuscript Collection, 110 vols., Tehran n. d.
Iqt = Bahā' Allāh: *Iqtidārāt wa chand Lawḥ-i dīgar*, Bombay 1893.
Ishr = Bahā' Allāh: *Ishrāqāt wa chand Lawḥ-i dīgar*, Bombay 1893.
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PDC = Shoghi Effendi: *The Promised Day is Come*, Wilmette (Illinois) 1980 (rev. ed.).
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TO THE ABODE OF THE HIDDEN ONE: THE GREEN ISLE IN SHĪʿĪ, EARLY SHAYKHĪ, AND BĀBĪ-BAHĀʾĪ SACRED TOPOGRAPHY

Omid Ghaemmaghami

One of the most prominent themes in books about the Twelver Shīʿī messiah known as the Hidden Imām—believed by the Twelver Shīʿa to have gone into hiding in the late 3rd/9th century—is the rather contentious matter of encounters and contact between this figure and a select cadre of his votaries during the period that has come to be known as the Greater Occultation. Among the more controversial of the accounts describing these encounters is the story of the Green Island in the White Sea. This account was widely accepted by Shīʿī scholars in the Safavid and Qajar periods and continues to have its proponents, though its veracity has also been seriously challenged, in particular in the twentieth century. This chapter will begin by tracing the provenance of the story of the Green Island. It will then proceed to study the highly original interpretation given to the account in the eschatological speculations of the first two leaders of the Shaykhiyya before concluding with a study of references to the Green Island in the writings of the central figures of the Bābī and Bahāʾī religions. With the latter, we will see how the motif of the Green Isle served the objective of demythologizing the Shīʿī promised figure while simultaneously signifying the fulfillment of Shīʿī messianic expectation in the person of the promised one and in the spiritual and physical topography associated with him.

The Green Island in Shiʿi Topography

The story of the Green Island in the White Seas (*al-jazīra al-khaḍrāʾ fī al-baḥr al-abyaḍ*) is said to have been recorded by a certain Majd al-Dīn al-Faḍl b. Yaḥyā b. Muẓaffar al-Ṭayyibī al-Kūfī, an alleged student of the Shīʿī jurist and poet Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292–1293 or 693/1293–1294).[1] In the account, al-Ṭayyibī recalls a 11 Shawwāl 699/8 July

[1] There are no references to al-Ṭayyibī al-Kūfī in the works of his contemporaries. In fact, the earliest *rijāl* sources that mention him are from the Safavid period after the story of the Green Island had become well-known. See e.g., al-Iṣbahānī (*fl.* early 12th/18th cent.),

1300 encounter in al-Ḥilla, Iraq, with an unknown Shīʿī scholar named Zayn al-Dīn ʿAlī b. al-Fāḍil al-Māzandarānī[2] who proceeded to describe a series of peregrinations from Damascus to Spain where he learned about and ultimately reached an archipelago of islands called *Jazāʾir al-rāfiḍa*, inhabited as the name suggests, by Shīʿa.[3] Eager to know where the inhabitants of these remote islands receive their food and supplies, he was apprised that their provisions come from the mysterious "Green Island in the White Sea, one of the islands [ruled by] the sons of the Imām."[4]

Riyāḍ iv, 377; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Amal* ii, 348 (no. 1072), who states that al-Ṭayyibī was a scholar and poet and that he (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī) saw a copy of al-Irbilī's *ijāza* to him, though there is no way of verifying this report as the copy of the *ijāza* has not survived. Cf. al-ʿĀmilī, *Dirāsa* 206.

[2] No other information is given about this person in Shīʿī biographical works other than the fact that he narrated the story of the Green Island. See al-Iṣbahānī, *Riyāḍ* iv, 175–6; al-Amīn, *Aʿyān* viii, 302–303.

[3] *Rāfiḍa*, pl. *rawāfiḍ* (lit., rejecters or deserters), originally used by Sunnī Muslims as a pejorative for the Shīʿa but later turned by the Shīʿa into a title of respect, meaning "those who reject evil" and follow the source of all goodness, i.e., the Imāms. See Kohlberg, al-Rāfiḍa or al-Rawāfiḍ.

[4] The White Sea is a *mare incognitum* and should not be confused with the Mediterranean Sea. In modern Arabic, the Mediterranean Sea is called "the middle white Sea (*al-baḥr al-abyaḍ al-mutawassiṭ*)" but this does not appear to have been its name in classical sources. Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam* i, 345, for instances, lists several names for the Mediterranean Sea (under the entry for *Baḥr al-maghrib*), but *al-baḥr al-abyaḍ* is not one of them. The Green Island is described in classical sources, e.g. al-Zabīdī, *Tāj* xiii, 299, as being situated directly across Gibraltar. Al-Zabīdī, *Tāj* vi, 190, also mentions a great island in Africa that was known as the Green Island and mentioned by al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī in his *ʿAjāʾib al-buldān*. It merits noting that in classical Arabic literature, *al-khaḍrāʾ* was a synonym for the sky or the heavens while *khaḍrāʾ* also signified the origin of something as well as prosperity and plentitude. Al-Zabīdī, *Tāj* vi, 350. Cf. a Shīʿī *ḥadīth* ascribed to Muḥammad stating that the sky received its green color from Mount Qāf, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* lvii, 237. The Green Island is situated by al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam* iv, 43, as across from the Moroccan city of Ṭanja. The name of the Spanish port city Algeciras is derived from the Arabic *al-jazīra al-khaḍrāʾ*, named after the offshore Isla Verde. See Huici-Miranda, al-Djazīra al-Khāḍrāʾ. The Arabic word *jazīra* means both island and peninsula (e.g. *jazīrat al-ʿArab* = the Arab Peninsula), and also denotes a maritime country and an oasis. See Ed., Djazīra. There have been no attempts to associate the White Sea mentioned in this story with the southern inlet of the Barents Sea in northwest Russia also known as the White Sea. Likewise, there have been no attempts to associate the Green Island with 1) the Canary Islands (known as *al-jazāʾir al-khālidāt* in Arabic) which were well-known to classical Arab geographers and Shīʿī scholars such as al-Majlisī, *Ikhtiyārāt* 81, who stated that the islands lie in Baḥr al-Maghrib which he also called Baḥr-i Ṭatanjah and Baḥr-i Anadalus; 2) Cape Verde (known as *al-raʾs al-akhḍar* in Arabic and founded in the 15th century CE); 3) the small island of Isla Verde in Antigá and Barbuda near Puerto Rico. The famous Sunnī exegete al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1853–1854), in his commentary on "the point where the two seas meet" (Q 18:60), identifies the two seas as Qulzum and Asraq—, one salt water and the other fresh water—, and the meeting point of the two seas as *al-jazīra al-khaḍrāʾ* in the West, likely Algericas. Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ* viii, 294.

Forty days later, a flotilla of seven ships arrived and a well-proportioned, comely, well-dressed man (*shaykh marbūʿ al-qāma bahī al-naẓar ḥasan al-zī*) emerged from the largest vessel and agreed to take Māzandarānī to the Green Island. After an additional sixteen days of travel by sea, the water turned white in color and palatable in taste (cf. Q 77:27). The Shaykh informed Māzandarānī that the white water magically protects the Green Island by causing the ships of the enemies of the Imām to sink whenever they approach it. Crossing this sea, the ships reached an verdant island of ineffable beauty with lush greenery, vivid foliage, delectable fruits and fragrant flowers the like of which Māzandarānī had never seen; paradise on earth.[5] In the island's mosque, Māzandarānī met Sayyid Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿĀlim who informed him that he had personally sent for him. He then spent the next nineteen days studying the Qurʾān with Shams al-Dīn, a man with a certain duende who introduced himself initially as the special representative (*al-nāʾib al-khāṣṣ*) of the Hidden Imām and later as one of his great grandchildren who visits the Imām at his private residence on the island each Friday and receives legal rulings and answers to religious questions to communicate to the faithful. One day, as the two explore the outskirts of the island, they are greeted by another radiant youth. Shams al-Dīn informed Māzandarānī that this youth and his companion serve in a domed mosque (*qubba*) located on a mountain in the island and that he himself visits the Hidden Imām in that mosque every Friday. When asked why it is that Māzandarānī has not encountered the Imām himself, Shams al-Dīn answered that in fact on his journey to the Green Island, Māzandarānī had seen the Hidden Imām and heard his mellifluous voice on two occasions. At the request of Shams al-Dīn, Māzandarānī left the island on the same ship on which he arrived, undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca and eventually reached Iraq where he settled in Najaf.[6] According to the account, before leaving the island, Māzandarānī posed over ninety questions to Shams al-Dīn and recorded his responses in a work called *al-Fawāʾid al-shamsiyya* which has

[5] The English word Paradise is derived from the Arabic *firdaws*, meaning garden, and traced to the Avestan Persian *pairidaēza*, Jeffery, *The foreign* 223–224.

[6] It may be instructive to compare the account with the more famous island and castaway classics of western literature such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Defoe's *Robin Crusoe*, and of course the most famous mythical isle of all—Atlantis—believed to have been located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and whose description by Plato and utopian portrayal by Bacon bear some striking similarities to the Green Island. On the history and development of literature about islands in Western culture, see Van Duzer, From Odyssey. See also Wensinck, *The Ocean*.

not survived. However, eight of these questions are mentioned in the text of the account and concern such issues as the corruption of the Qurʾān,[7] when the Hidden Imām will appear and whether it is possible to see him during the occultation.

The topoi and motifs found in the story of the Green Island are a typological refiguration of themes encountered in early Shīʿī literature. In a number of *ḥadīth*s found in al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī's (d. 290/902–903) *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, one of the earliest extant Shīʿī *ḥadīth* collections, the Imāms describe the arcane cities of Jābulqā and Jābulsā at the eastern and western most corners of the earth inhabited by archetypal believers who appear to be part tellurian and part angelic yet enjoy mystical communion with all the Imāms while awaiting the appearance of the Qāʾim.[8] Similarly, in the *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, composed between the 8th and 11th centuries CE and transmitted by Nuṣayrī Shīʿa,[9] al-Ṣādiq is quoted

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[7] This section of the account about the rejection of ʿAlī's copy of the *muṣḥaf* is cited in Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide* 207–208 (= Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 82–83), relying on an earlier translation by Corbin.

[8] Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* 490, 492. On the mythical cities of Jābalqā and Jābalsā in Islamic literature and specifically, their function in Shīʿī sources, see Wheeler, *Moses* 93–101; Arsanjānī, Jābulsā wa Jābulqā; Sajjādī and Sayyid-ʿArab, Jābulqā wa Jābulsā; Ghaemmaghami, From the Jābulqā. The *ḥadīth*s about Jābulqā and Jābulsā are often adduced by later Shīʿī scholars to argue for the existence of the Green Island since the Green Island itself is not mentioned in any of the early *ḥadīth* works. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659), for example in his *Lawāmiʿ-i ṣāḥibqirānī*, an extended Persian translation of his Arabic *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, itself a commentary on al-Ṣadūq's *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, in commenting on a prayer attributed to the ninth Imām that invokes blessings upon the Qāʾim's "descendants and family," avers that it is well-known (*mashhūr ast*) that the descendants of the Hidden Imām are all currently (*al-ḥāl mawjūdand*) in Jābulqā and Jābursā. After citing some of the "numerous *ḥadīth*s" with "sound" chains of transmission from *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣāʾir al-darājāt* that describe these two cities, al-Majlisī adds, "I have heard from my teachers (*mashāyikh*) and seen Traditions from the Imāms (*riwāyāt*) stating that the progeny (*awlād*) of the Lord of the *amr* are in these cities and from time to time, (the Imām) himself also visits these cities" (*gāhgāhī nīz ān ḥaḍrat khūd tashrīf mī-āwarand bi īn shahr-hā*). Al-Majlisī, *Lawāmiʿ-i* iv, 160. This passage is not found in al-Majlisī's Arabic commentary, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*. Mahdīpūr, *Kitābnāma-yi* i, 263, mentions an unpublished work titled, *Jābulqā wa Jābulsā*, by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bahārī al-Hamadānī (d. 1333/1915), a student of the prolific Ḥusayn Nūrī Ṭabarsī (d. 1320/1902) (on him, see below), that discusses "Traditions (*riwāyāt*) about Jābulqā, Jābulsā and the residence (*iqāmatgāh*) of the Mahdī." For other attempts to cite Traditions about these cities to affirm the validity of the story of the Green Island (as well as the story of the five islands, for which see below), see al-Bāḥrānī, *Tabṣirat* 259–264; Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 623–625; ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, *Dār al-salām* 475.

[9] Asatryan, Mofażżal; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs* 243–244, 263–264. Cf. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature* 163. On the *Kitāb al-haft*, see also Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* 240–74; Halm, *Die Schia* 188; Turner, The Tradition 185–186; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 241; and now Asatryan, *Heresy and Rationalism* 140–241.

as saying that during the *ghayba*, the Qā'im will live as a tramontane in the cities beyond Mount Qāf that encompass the earth.[10] Elsewhere, in expounding on the virtues of the intellect, al-Ṣādiq adduces the parable of an Israelite who worshipped God on a lush, verdant island with many trees and profluent fresh water, and was joined by an angel who appeared to him in the form of a human.[11]

Miraculous peregrinations to islands ruled by the Imāms are also an ancient topos in Shīʿī sources. In an account recorded in Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr's (*fl.* late 4th-early 5th/late 10th-early 11th cent.) *Dalā'il al-imāma*, and narrated on the authority of Dāwūd b. Kathīr al-Raqqī (d. ca. 200/816–817),[12] al-Ṣādiq miraculously transforms his home into a ship of vermilion rubies. Together with al-Ṣādiq's sons, both Ismāʿīl and Mūsā—emphasized perhaps as a conciliatory nod—they travel on a sea whose water was whiter than milk and sweeter than honey before reaching an island containing domed structures or mausoleums (*qibāb*, sing., *qubba*) made of white pearls and surrounded by angels who welcomed the Imām.[13] Al-Ṣādiq tells al-Raqqī that these mausoleums belong to the

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[10] Al-Juʿfī (attributed), *Kitāb al-haft* 169, 173. Each city is described as having 12,000 gates, each gate guarded by 12,000 men until the Day of Resurrection, which would appear to be day the Qā'im appears. This description is strikingly similar, and at times identical, to descriptions of the cities of Jābulqā and Jābulsā found in Shīʿī sources. The topos that the Hidden Imām is in a mountainous terrain during the *ghayba* has circulated in Shīʿī and revolutionary circles since at least the time of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81/700–701), whose followers claimed had not died but was hiding in the Raḍwā Mountain near Medina where he is said to be protected by tigers and lions and supplied with provisions of water and honey (see al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysānīyya* 180–1; Sindawi, The sea 469 (n. 107); Klemm, Die vier *Sufarā'* 126). On Mount Qāf in Muslim cosmology, see Streck, Ḳāf; in Persian literature, see Shamīsā, *Farhang-i* 455; Yāḥaqqī, *Farhang-i* 337–339; and in Shīʿī cosmology in particular, see al-Shahrastānī, *al-Hay'a* 359–389; Amir-Moezzi, Cosmogony 318. Among the Qā'im's epithets is "Phoenix of the ancient Qāf" (*ʿanqā' qāf al-qidam*) in al-Nūrī, *Jannat* 9.

[11] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* i, 11–12 (no. 8).

[12] Imāmī *rijāl* sources speak unfavorably of him and label him an extremist, corrupt and weak. See, for example, al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* 156 (no. 410); Newman, *The Formative* 82; Modarressi, *Tradition* 89; cf. Sindawi, The Sea 465 (n. 91). Other sources speak favorably about him and a *ḥadīth* of likely *Wāqifī* origin ascribed to al-Ṣādiq states that whoever wishes to see one of the companions of the Qā'im should look to Dāwūd b. Raqqī, cited in ʿAlawī, Mahdī-i 326.

[13] Cf. discussion of *qubbat Arīn* in n. 15 below as well as the interesting discussion in Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs* 112–115 of *qubba* (pl. *qibāb*) in classical sources, in particular Nuṣayrī literature, where it is used as a synonym of *kawr* and *dawr* to define historical cycles of time (e.g., *al-qubba al-fārisiyya* = period of the Persian kings before the rise of Islam) or prophetic dispensations (e.g., *al-qubba al-mūsawiyya* = the dispensation of Moses). Moreover, in al-Juʿfī (attributed), *Kitāb al-haft* 163, *qubba* seems to connote 'world' or 'planet' as al-Ṣādiq states that there are 12,000 *qubba* above our *qubba*. *Qubbat al-islām* is also an epithet of the Iraqi cities of Baṣra and, more frequently in Shīʿī sources, of Kūfa,

Imāms; whenever an Imām goes missing (*uftuqida*) (i.e., is believed by his followers to have died), he travels to his mausoleum to await the time of the Return (*al-rajʿa*).[14] The tallest dome in the center of the island serves as the seat of a throne and is reserved for the Qā'im.[15]

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al-Zabīdī, *Tāj* ii, 302; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxii, 386 (no. 28); Lane, *An Arabic-English* 2478. On the theme of the yet to be born Qā'im (and all the Imāms) in the pre-existential world, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide* 288 (n. 637); Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 136–140.

[14] On the Shīʿī doctrine of *al-rajʿa*, see Amir-Moezzi, Rajʿa; Kohlberg, Raḏ̲ʿa.

[15] Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il* 294–296 (no. 249); al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir* 301–4; Sindawi, The sea 458–459, 461, 464; Amir-Moezzi, Cosmogony 318. For an abridged Persian translation, see Majlisī, *ʿAyn* 147–148. In this connection, a related *ḥadīth* has al-Ṣādiq commanding the sea in Arabia to open and reveal what is inside. The sea parted and they witnessed that the deepest part of the water was "whiter than milk, sweeter than honey and more fragrant than musk." Al-Ṣādiq stated that this water belongs to the Qā'im and his companions: When the Qā'im appears, a great drought will envelop the earth and all its water will vanish. The believers will cry out to God and in response to their prayers, God will send this water down upon them. They will drink it but it will not be given to those who have wronged them. Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il* 461–462 (no. 442). Cf. a similar Tradition of ʿAlī magically splitting the sea, *à la mode de* Moses, to demonstrate the secrets of *walāya* (loyalty and love for the Imāms) to his followers, Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 201. According to a third report mentioned in the same work, al-Ṣādiq showed a man from Khurāsān a sea under the earth guarded by two horsemen identified by al-Ṣādiq as helpers of the Hidden Imām, al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il* 459–460 (no. 440); Sindawi, The sea 469, who comments that, "In this miracle the function of the sea is apparently to indicate the abode of the twelfth imām, whose spirit is preserved in that sea, on whose shore the two horsemen keep guard and await the imām's return." We may also mention here a *ḥadīth* reporting the journey of two men to an island (*jazīra min jazā'ir al-baḥr*) where they found the enigmatic al-Khiḍr praying. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii,43; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* iii, 672; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr* iii, 292; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xiii, 297. A different Shīʿī *ḥadīth* states that the angel Fuṭrus lived on an island in the sea (presumably, he was banished there) for five hundred years before having his status as an angel restored at the birth of al-Ḥusayn. See al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il* 190; Hyder, *Reliving* 24. In contrast, some sources, e.g. Donaldson, *The Wild* 35, 45, place Satan and some of his demons on a green island near the mythical Mount Qāf. Other sources indicate that Ibn Ṣā'id (or Ṣayyād), identified in some Shīʿī sources as *al-masīḥ al-dajjāl* (the Anti-Christ), is said to be imprisoned in an island in the Caspian Sea. See Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 803; Donaldson, *The Shiʿite* 239; cf. Cook, *Studies* 104. On Ibn al-Ṣayyad in Shīʿī sources, see Cook, *Studies*, index, s.v. Ibn Ṣayyād. The image of the Dajjāl "chained to a rock on an island far distant from Arabia" is also found in Sunnī sources. See Algar, Dajjāl. We should also note possible cross-fertilizations between these *ḥadīth*s and the story found in the Epistles of the Brethren of Sincerity about a prosperous city located on a mountain in an island whose inhabitants live in peace and comfort (for summary, see Madelung, An Ismaili 162) as well as Ibn Ṭufayl al-Andalūsī's (d. 581/1185) *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān*, perhaps the island story *par excellence* in the Islamic literary tradition. Cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī who compared his spiritual experiences to a voyage through the Sea of Proximity (*baḥr al-dunuww*) to the abode of one he could not name, see Homerin, Filled 108–109, and who credited the words of his *magnum opus* as proceeding from a mysterious youth (*fatā*) described as being "of a spiritual essence" and endowed "with lordly attributes" who Ibn al-ʿArabī met at the Arīn spring. The name Arīn a cipher in Islamic topographical texts for a mythic island or city located at the geographical centre of the earth. See Chodkiewicz, Introduction 20. On Arīn, also called *qubbat al-ʿālam*, *qubbat al-arḍ* and *qubbat Arīn* (the dome of the world, of the earth, of Arīn), from the idea

The story of the Green Island is also similar to a different account dated Ramaḍān 542/1148 or 543/1149 of a believer who travels to five islands in the west, each ruled by one of the sons of the Hidden Imāms.[16] Commenting on a prayer about the twelfth Imām (which happens to refer to the appearance of others Imāms after the Qā'im), Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) states, "I found a narration with a continuous chain of transmission mentioning that the Mahdī has deeply pious sons ruling over a number of islands in the sea."[17] The story of the Green Island may in fact be a pastiche of this earlier account.

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that the center of the earth is a location of high elevation, see Pellat, al-Ḳubba, Ḳubbat al-ʿĀlam. Cf. the concept of *axis mundis* (lit., the "hub" or "axis" of the universe), often represented by a cosmic mountain as the locus where heaven and earth intersect, in the study of the history of religions, see Sullivan, Axis Mundis. Another possible comparison is the allegory of Salāmān and his lover Absāl who flee to a paradisiacal island in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī's (d. 998/1492) *Salāmān wa Absāl*.

[16] The earliest work to record the account in full is al-Nīlī's (*fl.* late 8th-early 9th/late 14th/early 15th cent.; d. ca. 803/1400–1401) *al-Sulṭān* 75–91 (no. 15). The account is also found in al-Bayāḍī's (d. 877/1472–1473) *al-Ṣirāṭ* ii, 264–6; Ardabīlī, *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa* ii, 1007–1013 (Persian translation of the account in al-Bayāḍī); al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir* 295–9 (no. 1), sans introduction. Surprisingly, the account is not recorded in *Biḥār* but is recorded in the work of al-Majlisī's student al-Jazā'irī, *Riyāḍ* iii, 145–150 (no. 186), who states that he found the story in "one/some of the books of our *'ulamā'*." The story is also recorded by Y. al-Baḥrānī, *Kashkūl*, 112–117, after the story of the Green Island. It is also recorded in al-Nūrī, *Jannat* 24–32 (no. 3), where it is labeled "a story resembling the account of the Green Island" in a newer edition of the book; Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 462–481 (no. 2); ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, *Dār* 462–472; al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* ii, 18–22 (no. 11); Nahāwandī, *Barakāt-i* 439–448 (Persian translation based on the account in al-Jazā'irī's *al-Anwār al-nuʿmānıyya*). On other sources, see Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 131. For abridged French translation, see Corbin, Au pays 68–76. The account of the five islands is often mistaken with the story of the Green Island. See, for examples, al-Ṭihrānī, *Ṭabaqāt* 400; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xxv, 88; al-Ḥalawājī, *al-Qiṣaṣ* 200–208; al-Zubaydī, *Arwaʿ* 96–106; Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 131 (n. 79), who notes that the story of the Green Island is found in Nūrī's *Jannat*, but the account in *Jannat* is in fact the story of the five islands. Nūrī also mentions an account from the Safavid period of a believer stranded on an island in the Indian Ocean who saw a giant viper killed by a scorpion, encountered a community of people and realized after being miraculously transported back to his home that one of them was the Hidden Imām (*ṣāḥib al-dār*) and the community presumably his family and helpers. Al-Nūrī, *Jannat* 132–135 (no. 57); Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 739–41 (no. 83); al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* ii, 59–60 (no. 39). Another account with similar details is found in al-Nūrī, *Jannat* 108–10 (no. 45); Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 632–634 (no. 38); al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* ii, 41–42 (no. 26). As it would happen, there is a "Green Island" in the Indian Ocean: Pemba Island, which forms part of the Zanzibar archipelago, is called *al-jazīra al-khaḍrā'* in Arabic. See Dihkhudā, Lughatnāma, s.v. *Jazīra-yi khaḍrā'*.

[17] Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Jamāl* 310. Nūrī, *Jannat* 32, believed this sentence by Ibn Ṭāwūs to be a "definite" reference to the story of the five islands. In this connection, it is of no minor significance that certain Shīʿī *ḥadīth*s found in Fatimid Ismāʿīlī texts speak about the Mahdī-Qā'im "appearing from the west" (*yakhruj min al-maghrib*). Such reports were interpreted by the Ismāʿīlī scholar, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), as prophecies about the rise of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mahdī from the West (i.e., North Africa). See al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān,

That the Hidden Imām lives in western lands with his children was a belief circulated in the early Safavid period. In the conclusion of his *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ*, completed in 908/1502–1503, the prolific Timurid scholar Ḥusayn Wāʿiẓ Kāshifī Sabzawārī (d. 910/1504–1505)[18] observes that, "according to some, in the western-most lands of the earth (*dar aqṣā-yi bilād-i maghrib*), there are cities under (the Hidden Imām's) control [where] he is confirmed by his children and descendants. "Verily, He knows the secret and even that which is most hidden" (Q 20:7)."[19] Abbas Amanat conjectured that *maghrib* here may be "a faint allusion to Ismāʿīl and the rising house of the Safawids"[20] or could "be taken as a relic of the Fatimid messianic legacy in North Africa."[21] Yet it is also possible that Kāshifī is referring to some version of the story of the Green Island.

Though the date given in the story of the Green Island is 699/1300, the earliest work in which the account appears (in Persian translation no less) is *Ithbāt al-ghayba wa-kashf al-ḥayra*, a short treatise by a certain Shād-Muḥammad Ḥalawāyī Nīshābūrī dedicated to the second Safavid ruler, Ṭahmāsp I (d. 1576, ruled 930–84/1525–1576).[22] In the same century, a reference to the story can be found in the well-known Shīʿī jurist al-Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūshtarī's (d. 1019/1610–1611) *Majālis al-muʾminīn*.[23] In discussing

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Sharḥ iii, 363 (no. 1233), 376 (no. 1247), 395 (no. 1275). On this work, see Poonawala, Hadith iii. In Ismaʿilism. Later Twelver Shīʿa claimed that al-Nuʿmān was in fact a Twelver Shīʿī practicing *taqiyya*. This view is dismissed in Poonawala, A Reconsideration; Poonawala, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān 276–277. It also merits pointing out that in classical Ismāʿīlī sources, *jazīra* referred to various propaganda districts. See Ivanow, The Organization. The Ismāʿīlī mission or 'Call to Truth' (*daʿwat al-ḥaqq*) divided the world into twelve regions, each called a *jazīra*, headed by a *ḥujja* (Grandmaster) or *naqīb* (Chief). See Gurūh-i Jughrāfiyā, Jazīrah (1); Madelung, Das Imamat 62; Halm, *The Empire* 47–51; Amir Arjomand, Islamic Apocalypticism 270, 272.

[18] On the author, see now, Subtelny, Kāšefi.

[19] Kāshifī-Sabzawārī, *Rawḍat* 520 (for alternate translation, see Amanat, Meadow 269). Ardabīlī, *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa* ii, 962, also stated that the Imām, though hidden, has cities under his control in the west (*dar ṭaraf-i maghrib*). Stories of journeys to western lands appear to have been a popular motif in the Safavid period. A poem from circa 1000/1591–1592 by Ḥusayn b. Ḥasan Fārigh features a story about ʿAlī visiting the city of Jābulsā "on the shores of the Western sea," a six-month journey from Medina. The city was inhabited by Christians and a Spiritual Master who lived as a hermit. ʿAlī was able to convert all of the island's inhabitants to Islam. See Bausani, *Religion* 313; for similar stories, see Donaldson, *The Wild* 90, 118.

[20] Amanat, Meadow 269.

[21] Amanat, Meadow 275 (n. 53).

[22] Nīshābūrī, *Ithbāt*. The only known manuscript is available at the National Library in Iran. The colophon has a date of 25 Dhū al-Qaʿda 952/7 February 1546. I am in the process of studying this manuscript and comparing it to later versions of the story.

[23] On Shūshtarī, who emigrated from Iran to India where he was subsequently executed, see Sharīʿatī, Shūshtarī; Corbin, *History* 322–323.

sacred places, Shūshtarī includes an entry on "the island of the green sea [sic] and white sea" located in the land of the Berbers in the Andalusian Sea where the Hidden Imām lives together with his children and companions.[24] Shūshtarī reports that the story has been recorded by Ibn Muḥammad al-Makkī (d. 786/1384–1385), known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal, as well as by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad [b.] Asad Allāh Shūshtarī (d. 963/1555–1556) at the request of the Shāh in a Persian treatise about the wisdom and expediency of the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imām.[25] Shūshtarī then states that according to the account, "the Imam and his sons and disciples are said to be engaged in teaching and learning of the religious lore on the island, while armies stand in preparation outside the land, awaiting the Imam's word for the rising."[26]

By the late Safavid period, the story of the Green Island was being referred to by numerous scholars. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700) included the account in a chapter of volume 13 of his *Biḥār al-anwār* (completed in 1078/1667–1668)[27] entitled, "Rare (*nādir*) are the accounts of those who have seen (the Hidden Imām) during the Greater Occultation close to our time." Al-Majlisī opened the chapter with the words: "I found a treatise famously known (*risāla mushtahira*) as the story of the Green Island in the White Sea and decided to include it [in this volume] as it is the story of someone who saw (the Hidden Imām) and because it contains has many strange things (*al-gharā'ib*). I chose to place it in a separate chapter because I could not find (the account) [mentioned in] any credible sources."[28] The story was likewise mentioned by two of al-Majlisī's contemporaries: 1) Mīr Lawḥī (*fl.* 11th/17th cent),[29] who refers to "the story of the white sea and the green island, the story of the city of the Shīʿa and the city at the westernmost point of the earth"[30] as among

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[24] Shūshtarī, *Kitāb-i* i, 78–79; Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 131 (n. 79).

[25] Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* iv, 93–94 (no. 428); v, 106, identifies the Shāh as Ṭahmāsb I (d. 984/1576) and the title of the work by Shams al-Dīn Shushtarī/al-Tustarī as *Ithbāt wujūd ṣāḥib al-zamān* (on this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* i, 109 (no. 533)) and speculates that the translation was completed by al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 940/1533–1534), published in India, and later recorded by Shams al-Dīn Shūshtarī in his work.

[26] Translated in Amir-Arjomand, *The Shadow* 162. Shūshtarī, *Kitāb-i* i, 79, adds that he has read in "certain reliable books," which he does not name, that there are cities in the western Muslim lands (*dar diyār-i maghrib*) fully inhabited by Shīʿa.

[27] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* liii, 197.

[28] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* liii, 159; Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 131 (n. 79).

[29] On the author, see Hairi, Mīr Lawḥī; Turner, *Islam* 212–3; Turner, Still Waiting 45–47.

[30] Sabzawārī, *Kifāyat* 638.

the sound narrations and explicit proofs of the Imām's existence in his *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* (completed in 1080/1672–1673);[31] and 2) the famous polymath Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 1091/1680), who includes an abridged version of the story in his *Nawādir al-akhbār fī mā yataʿallaq bi-uṣūl al-dīn*.[32]

The account was subsequently mentioned by numerous scholars in the late Safavid period and was the most popular and widely accepted story about the Imām's location until the late 20th century.[33] Among the prominent Shīʿī authorities of this period who recorded the account in their works are al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693),[34] Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695–1696 or 1109/1697–1698),[35] Niʿmat Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701),[36] ʿAbd Allāh al-Baḥrānī (*fl.* early 12th/late 17th-early 18th cent.),[37] Abū al-Ḥasan

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[31] Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xviii, 102.

[32] Al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir* 300–305 (no. 2), in the chapter, "the location (*maqām*) of the children of the Qā'im during the Greater Occultation." (The *Nawādir* was completed after his two earlier *ḥadīth* compilations, *al-Wāfī* and *al-Shāfī*). Al-Kāshānī does not mention a source for the account. al-Kāshānī also appears to allude to the story of the Green Island in his survey of the tenets of Shīʿī Islam, *ʿIlm al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* ii, 986–987: "Among the people is someone who reached (the Hidden Imām's) city during one of his journeys, saw him there, heard him speak and witnessed him perform wondrous things. It is also said that (the Imām) has children, companions, servants and an entourage in his city, that God has concealed that city and its inhabitants from the eyes of men, and that (the Imām) [leaves the island to] attend the season (of pilgrimage) every year."

[33] As observed by Aṣlānī, Barrasī-i, "In the Savafid period, the story of the Green Island became widespread and led to several books being written about the account."

[34] Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt* v, 335–336 (no. 159), transmits a part of the story from *Biḥār*. He also refers to the account of the five islands: "And he (i.e. al-Bayāḍī in his *al-Ṣirāṭ*) has transmitted a long account the gist of which is that the Mahdī and his children [live] in huge, expansive islands in the sea inhabited by more Shīʿa than people on earth. Each of his sons rules one of the islands and God knows best [what the truth is]." Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt* v, 207; Saʿādatparwar, *Ẓuhūr-i* 212. Cf. Ishtihārdī, *Ḥaḍrat-i* 49, who in misreading al-ʿĀmilī has erroneously claimed that the story has been narrated by the tenth Shīʿī Imām.

[35] Al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat* 243–251 (no. 95), who labels the account, "Abū Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad the scholar, ʿAlī b. Fāḍil, and the sincere ones who see (the Hidden Imām) at the beginning of each year on the Green Island which is ruled by a grandson of the Imām." Al-Baḥrānī begins by stating that the account was transmitted to him by one (or some) of his teachers. The account as it appears in this work is markedly different from the version recorded by al-Majlisī in his *Biḥār*, leading al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Jazīra* 242, to conclude that the teacher al-Baḥrānī refers to here is not al-Majlisī. The comment by Madelung (in Madelung, Baḥrānī) that this work includes only accounts of those who saw the Hidden Imām "down to the year 664/1265–1266" needs to be corrected.

[36] Al-Jazā'irī, *Riyāḍ* iii, 135–145 (from *Biḥār*). Al-Jazā'irī assisted al-Majlisī in compiling the *Biḥār* and it is not surprising that he records stories found in his *Biḥār*.

[37] According to al-Nūrī, *Faṣl* 8, al-Baḥrānī has recorded the story in his encyclopedic work, *ʿAwālim al-ʿulūm wa-l-maʿārif wa-l-aḥwāl min al-āyāt wa-l-akhbār wa-l-aqwāl*, a 100 volume collection of *ḥadīth* that according to al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xv, 356, is much larger

al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 1139/1726–1727),[38] and ʿAbd Allāh Afandī al-Iṣbahānī [al-Iṣfahānī] (*fl.* early 12th/18th cent.).[39] In this connection, it is of no minor significance that a treatise written in 1127/1715 to defend the legitimacy of the Safavid kings adduces the "famous and well-known" story of the Green Island to interpret *ḥadīth*s found in early Shīʿī sources about a series of Mahdīs who will appear after the Qāʾim.[40]

The story is also mentioned by numerous post-Safavid and Qajar scholars, such as al-Ḥuwayzī (d. after 1186/1772–1773),[41] Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1773),[42] Mīrzā Muḥammad Akhbārī (d. 1232/1816),[43] Asad Allāh al-Shaftī (d. 1290/1873),[44] ʿAbbās al-Tustarī (d. 1306/1889),[45] Maythamī-ʿIrāqī (d. 1310/1893),[46] Ismāʿīl Nūrī Ṭabarsī (d. 1318/1900–1901),[47] Ḥusayn Nūrī Ṭabarsī (d. 1320/1902),[48] and at least two of Ḥusayn Nūrī's students:

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than al-Majlisī's *Biḥār*. The volume on the twelfth Imām that contains the story of the Green Island has never been published and does not seem to have survived.

[38] According to Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 694 and al-Nūrī, *Jannat* 95, al-ʿĀmilī, a student of al-Majlisī, recorded a condensed version of the account in his *Diyāʾ al-ʿālamīn fī al-imāma*. On al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, see now Amir-Moezzi, al-ʿĀmilī [sic].

[39] Al-Iṣbahānī, *Riyāḍ* iv, 175–176 (a brief summary of the account under an entry for Fāḍil al-Māzandarānī).

[40] Nājī, *Risālah* 183–185. This treatise was written during the reign of the last Safavid king Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1694–1722), at time when the Safavid dynasty was in great decline and facing major revolts. The author, a certain Muḥammad Yūsuf, surnamed Nājī, argues that the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin wa taʾwīl*) of the Traditions about the twelve Mahdīs who appear after the Qāʾim is the Hidden Imām's children/descendants on the Green Island "because they are hidden," while the exoteric meaning (*ẓāhir wa tanzīl*) is the Safavid rulers who are descendants of the seventh Imām, Nājī, *Risālah* 186.

[41] See al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Jazīra* 246 (no. 12).

[42] Y. al-Baḥrānī, *Kashkūl* 98–108. On the author, see Kohlberg, al-Baḥrānī. Perhaps the first scholar to mention the Green Island in the west was Shaykh Kāẓim al-Dujaylī of Baghdad who stated as part of a lecture delivered in London in 1924 that Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī "records in his work the *Kashkūl* by a chain of authorities how someone saw the Lord of the Age in the Green Isle in the White (Mediterranean) Sea with his children and grandchildren, and this witness described their city and their mode of life," El Dojaily, The Shiʿah 98.

[43] See Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i* v, 1516.

[44] Al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* i, 413–430 (from *Biḥār*). On the author, see al-Kāẓimī, *Aḥsan al-wadīʿa* 62–65.

[45] ʿAbbās al-Tustarī, a Lucknow-born jurist and poet and descendant of al-Jazāʾirī, wrote a commentary on the story of the Green Island called *Nasīm al-ṣabā fī sharḥ qiṣṣat al-jazīra al-khaḍrāʾ* which has not been published. Al-Amīn, *Aʿyān* vii, 412; ʿAlī, *al-Mahdī* 50; Mahdīpūr, *Kitābnāma-yi* ii, 748.

[46] ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, *Dār* 448–462 (Persian translation of the account from *Biḥār*). Maythamī's translation is different than the earlier Persian translation by Urūmiyya-ʾī (about which, see below).

[47] Nūrī-Ṭabarsī, *Kifāyat* ii, 829–836 (Persian translation).

[48] Nūrī translated the account as found in *Biḥār* into Persian in Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 597–615 (no. 37). He also cites from the story in his *Jannat al-maʾwā* 146.

al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī (d. 1333/1914–1915)[49] and ʿAlī-Akbar Nahāwandī (d. 1369/1950).[50] The story is moreover referred to in ʿAlī Aṣghar Burūjirdī's (*fl.* mid 13th/19th cent.) synopsis of Shīʿī beliefs where we read that the Hidden Imām likely resides "in the western lands, in an island located in a green sea (or conversely, the sea of Khiḍr) for it is well known from historical accounts that some have journeyed there."[51] As observed by Dhabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā in his history of Persian literature, most of the books written about the twelfth Imām and the issue of encounters with him and his place of residence mention the story of the Green Island.[52]

Some scholars have cited from parts of the account or referred to it in their works indicating that they viewed it as a reliable report.[53] Other scholars, both Akhbārī and Uṣūlī, have relied on the account or cited it as a credible narration in their works on *fiqh*[54] and *rijāl*.[55] Ḥasan Anūshah begins the entry on the Green Island in the *Dā'irat al-maʿārif-i tashayyuʿ* by stating almost axiomatically that it is "the island of the Lord of the Age; the name of an island which in later Shīʿī narrations, is [identified as] the residence of the Imām of the (final) age and four of his sons who

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[49] Al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī included the account in his *Ilzām* ii, 69–80 (from *Biḥār*), while hoping in the introduction (al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām* i, 11) that his book would attract people to the Green Island. For a list of other scholars who have mentioned the account in their work, see al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Jazīra* 239–256; al-Nūrī, *al-Najm* (trans. Mūsawī) ii, 172–174 (n. 3 provided by the translator).

[50] Nahāwandī, *Barakāt-i* 328–337.

[51] Al-Burūjirdī, *Kitāb-i ʿaqā'id* 98. Burūjirdī then refers to some of the details found in the aforementioned story of the five islands. According to al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xv, 131, Burūjirdī wrote his Shīʿī creed in 1263/1846–1847, dedicating it to Muḥammad Shāh Qājār. For a summary of its contents, see Browne, *Literary* iv, 381–402, who used a different manuscript (438 pages) than the copy (132 pages) accessible to me. On the author, who also wrote a refutation of the Bābī religion (al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xv, 202), see al-Amīn, *Aʿyān* viii, 167; Elwell-Sutton, ʿAlī Aṣġar.

[52] Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i* v, 1518.

[53] Al-Muḥaqqiq al-Kāẓimī (d. 1237/1821–1822), *Maqābis* 12, for example, highlights the fact that al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī's erudition has been attested to in the account. This in turn is repeated by *ʿulamā'* after him, e.g., Tunikābunī (d. 1302/1885), *Qiṣaṣ* (completed in 1290/1873–1874) 474; al-Nūrī, *Khātimat* ii, 466; Qummī (d. 1359/1940), *al-Fawā'id* i, 124. Al-Kāẓimī, *Kashf* 231, also mentions the story while discussing those who have encountered the Hidden Imām. Al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348/1930), *Mikyāl* i, 97, cites a passage from the story that suggests that the Imām visits the shrines of his ancestors. See also Saʿādatparwar, *Ẓuhūr-i* 212.

[54] See for example al-Bihbihānī, *al-Ḥāshiyya* iii, 187; al-Bihbihānī, *Maṣābīḥ al-ẓalām* i, 397; al-Narāqī (d. 1245/1829–1830), *Mustanad* vi, 60.

[55] See for example, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Rijāl* iii, 136–137, under his description of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā.

rule its cities."[56] There continues to be interest in the story as suggested by the recent publication of *Jazīra-yi khushbakhtī* (The Island of Bliss) by the prolific publishing house associated with the Jamkarān Mosque in Qom.[57] Moreover, in a recently published study of Iran's revolutionary guards, Swedish anthropologist David Thurfjell noted that when he asked his informants "about the Mahdī's whereabouts," many answered that "the hidden leader lives with his friends on a hidden green island in the ocean."[58] The account clearly continues to be read with great interest.[59]

On the other hand, many *ʿulamāʾ* in the modern period have sought to confute those who have spread the story of the Green Island and extenuate in the process the legitimacy of the Green Island. The first scholar who openly criticized the story, other than Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (on whom, see below), was Shaykh Jaʿfar al-Najafī, known as Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ (d. 1227/1812), the polemical champion of the Uṣūlī school and archenemy of Mīrzā Muḥammad Akhbārī (d. 1232/1816–1817), the leading exponent of the Akhbārī cause in the late 18th/early 19th century.[60] In his *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn fī taṣwīb al-mujtahidīn wa-takhṭiʾat juhhāl al-akhbāriyyin*, Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ blasted the unenlightened Akhbārīs for, *inter alia*, their indiscriminate use of *ḥadīth*s and uncritical reliance on strange stories and narrations.[61] To make his point, he adduced the story of "an island in the

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[56] Anūshah, *Jazīra-yi* 363. Anūshah here is mixing details between the story of the Green Island and the story of five islands.

[57] Pūr-Wahhāb, *Jazīra-yi*. By December 2009, this work was already in its third printing. See INBA.ir, Jazīrah-yi khushbakhtī. The introduction states that a believer can only see the Imām (presumably on the Green Island) after avoiding sin, becoming God-conscious, and carrying out his religious duties.

[58] Thurfjell, *Living* 160. The account has also gained prominence in western sources due to the contributions of Corbin. In his book on the motif of the Green Man across world cultures, for instance, Matthews, *The Quest* 30, writes: "The green color associated with Khidir is also the spiritual color of Islam. Paradise itself is said to be green, and the twelfth, or 'hidden' *imam*, a spiritual leader who will appear sometime in the future, is described as living on a green island in a sea of whiteness."

[59] See, for example, Amir-Moezzi, Jamkarân 158, who recalls his being intrigued as a youth in Iran with the story of the Green Island and the secret city ruled by the initiates of the Hidden Imām, before recounting a dream seen in a feverish state in which he visited a city underneath Jamkarān inhabited by companions of the Hidden Imām and a young man (presumably the Imām himself) who initiated him into the knowledge of certain mysteries.

[60] On his role in opposing the Akhbārīs, see Algar, Kāšef al-ḡeṭāʾ; Madelung, Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ; Kohlberg, Aspects 152. Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ was a staunch opponent of *taḥrīf*, the claim that the Qurʾān has been distorted. See al-Amīn, *al-Shīʿa* 163–164. On Akhbārī, see Algar, Aḵbārī, Mīrzā Moḥammad.

[61] On this work, see Algar, Kāšef al-ḡeṭāʾ; Rajabī, *ʿUlamā-yi* 381; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* vii, 37–38 (no. 190), who points out that Mīrzā Muḥammad al-Akhbārī promptly wrote

sea known as the Green Island," which according to Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, an Akhbārī scholar found in a book full of fabricated and useless reports that no one before him had ever even bothered to consider. Unable to suppress his incredulity at what he perceived as an overly lax attitude of the Akhbārīs toward *ḥadīth*s and narrations, Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ declared: "It's as if (the ignorant among the Akhbārīs) have never seen the *ḥadīth*s affirming that no one can see [the Imām] during the Greater Occultation and refuse to follow the words of the *ʿulamāʾ* who affirm this (to be the truth)."[62] On the next page, he rebuked the Akhbārīs for their "ludicrous accounts and bizarre fabrications that not even an ignoramus would dream of publishing, let alone the sane of mind."[63] A contemporary of Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, Muḥammad Āl ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. after 1250/1834–1835) argued in his *Hady al-ʿuqūl* that that the story of the Green Island is not consistent with the doctrine of the Imām's concealment and can in no way be substantiated by rational or traditional proofs.[64] Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī appears to have been torn in his assessment of the account. He called the story of the Green Island "symbolic" (*ramziyya*)[65] and stated in his biography of Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī that when Shīrāzī's students followed him to Samarrāʾ, the city became "like the Green Island in terms of spirituality."[66] Yet elsewhere, he called it "unrealistic" (*khiyāliyya*) and "a fable in the key of the Fabulous Gryphon" (*usṭūra ʿalā minwāl ʿanqāʾ maghrib*).[67]

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a response to *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn* called *al-Ṣayḥa bi-l-ḥaqq ʿalā man alḥada wa-tazandaqa*, which does not appear to have survived.

[62] Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *al-Ḥaqq* fol. 87; cited by Muḥammad-ʿAlī Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1358AS/1979) in the margins of al-Jazāʾirī, *al-Anwār* ii, 64 (n. 1). Persian translation cited in Dhākirī, Irtibāṭ 96; Ṭabasī, Jazīra-yi khaḍrā. See also Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 131 (n. 80). On the *ḥadīth*s that Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ is alluding to here and on the greater question of whether the Imām can be seen during the Greater Occultation, see now, Ghaemmaghami, Seeing.

[63] Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, *al-Ḥaqq* fol. 88. Curiously, the word *juhhāl* has been removed from the title of Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ's work in identifying this manuscript on the website of *Kitābkhāna-yi dīgītāl*. Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ's criticism of the Akhbārī commitment to selcouth reports foreshadowed the criticism of Khomeini and other Uṣūlī jurists some two centuries later who used the term Akhbārī "only as a pejorative label to designate the apolitical, 'stagnant,' and 'supersititious' orientation of those clerics who [did] not subscribe to the politicized and ideological Islam of the militant *ʿulamāʾ*…" Amir Arjomand, Ideological 196.

[64] Āl ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Hady* ix, 113.

[65] Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xxv, 88 (no. 484).

[66] Al-Rūzdarī (d. ca. 1290/1873–1874), *Taqrīrāt* i, 29 (from the introduction, citing from al-Ṭihrānī's *Hadiyyat al-Rāzī*).

[67] Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xxv, 296 (no. 189); xxiv, 156 (no. 803). Cf. al-Najjār, *al-Jazīra* 362–373, who contends that the passages in *al-Dharīʿa* in which al-Ṭihrānī criticizes the story have been interpolated by his son.

Critics of the story of the Green Island and the story of the five islands multiplied in the twentieth century. One of sharpest criticisms of the account is registered by Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī (d. 1415/1995) who maintained in his *al-Akhbār al-dakhīla* that both the account of the Green Island and the account of the five islands rules were fabricated (*waḍʿ*) perhaps by an enemy of the Shīʿa.[68] Al-Tustarī was the first scholar to point out that al-Majlisī did not mention who wrote the account and was unable to locate the story in any "reliable book" (*kitāb muʿtabar*).[69] As a result, he suggests that one of the enemies of the Shīʿa planted the story where al-Majlisī could discover it in an attempt to discredit them.

The story was moreover excised from the popular Persian translation of volume 13 of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār*. The translator, ʿAlī Dawānī (d. 2007), wrote, "This story was written in an unreliable booklet. Since Majlisī had decided to include everything that related to the Shīʿa or the Imāms in his *Biḥār al-anwār*, he included this account even though he did not consider it reliable. We, however, refuse to waste fifteen pages on translating an unreliable story that is not found in any credible or reliable Shīʿī book."[70] Muḥammad-ʿAlī Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1358AS/1979) likewise cites Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ's explanation in the margins to al-Jazāʾirī *al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyya* before adding,

> We have no need for these stories and tales (in order to prove that the Imām exists), nor should we narrate them in our books, not when there are verses in the Quran and widely transmitted *ḥadīth*s narrated by Sunnis and Shiʿa about the Hidden Imām, and not when modern science has proven that a human being can live in the world for thousands of years. Likewise, there is no need to claim that (the Imām) lives in the Eighth Clime, Jābulqā and Jābulsā or that he has a *barzakhī*, imaginal (*al-mithālī*) body or the other drivel nonsense that is antithetical to the way of the Imāms. These are all claims that have no basis in evidence.[71]

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[68] Al-Tustarī, *al-Akhbār* 146–148. On the author, see Jamʿī, ʿAllāma Shūshtarī.

[69] Al-Tustarī, *al-Akhbār* 128, 148.

[70] Majlisī, *Mahdī-i* 934 (n. 1). In the introduction of the same book (Majlisī, *Mahdī-i* 97), Dawānī states that he chose to leave out the story of the Green Island to make the book easier to use and study. Not surprisingly, Dawānī excluded the story of the Green Island in his own books on the Hidden Imām, e.g., Dawānī, *Dānishmandān-i* and Dawānī, *Mawʿūdī*. Cf. an earlier Persian translation of volume 13 of *Biḥār* by Ḥasan Urūmiyya-ʾī which does include the story of the Green Island, Majlisī, *Mahdī-i* (trans. Urūmiyya-ʾī) i, 755–772.

[71] Al-Jazāʾirī, *al-Anwār* ii, 69 (footnote by al-Qāḍī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī). For other modern and contemporary criticisms of the account as a forgery and/or a superstition, see Gulpāyigānī, *Pāsukh-i* 55; al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab* iii, 422–429; Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i* 208, 214–215 [= Amini, *al-Imām* 214, 220–222]; al-Dūzdūzānī, *Taḥqīq* 62; Dhākirī, Irtibāṭ 95, 102–103; Hussain, *The awaited*. The criticisms of the account registered by al-ʿĀmilī, al-Tustarī,

Popular Interest in the Green Island however reached new heights in 1979 when Iraqi researcher Nājī al-Najjār argued that the island is in the Bermuda triangle based on the latter's location and perceived paranormal associations.[72] The late Grand Ayatollah Shihāb al-Dīn al-Marʿashī al-Najafī (d. 1369AS/1990), who himself is reputed by his acolytes to have met the Hidden Imām, is said to have hailed al-Najjār's "discovery" and celebrated the fact that the location of the Green Island was not known until researchers discovered the Bermuda triangle.[73] In 1400/1979–1980, the prolific scholar and jurist ʿAlī al-Mīlānī (b. 1367/1948) discussed the account in his introduction to Nūrī's *Kashf al-astār*. Conceding that the subject has become an issue of debate among the *ʿulamā'*, he argued that there was no reason to reject the account: "The likelihood that an island like (the Green Island) has not been found is not evidence in and of itself [of its nonexistence]. The fact of the matter is that many things we believed to be unlikely have turned out to be true and many things we thought unlikely to occur have come to pass." He objected to Dawānī's distortion of the al-Majlisī's *Biḥār* by removing the story from his translation and mentioned approvingly the work of al-Najjār about the Bermuda Triangle.[74] More recently, Lebanese scholar ʿAlī al-Kūrānī openly suggested

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Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, Ibrāhīm Amīnī, Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, Muḥammad-Bāqir Bihbūdī, al-Ṭihrānī, and al-Qāḍī al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī are compiled and translated (into Persian) in Jamʿī az dānishmandān-i muʿāṣir, *Jazīra-yi*, a work that has been published at least four different times in Iran. For other critiques of the account that repeat and summarize mainly the works of al-Tustarī and al-ʿĀmilī, see Shaykhī, Naqd-i 59–79; Ṭabasī, Jazīra-yi; and Kalbāsī, Barrasī. See also the 340 page monograph, Naẓarī, *al-Jazīra*, who argues in part that the account was forged by enemies of the Shīʿa as part of a larger anti-Shīʿī conspiracy and interpolated into Shīʿī works to embarrass and discredit their community.

[72] Al-Najjār, *Fī biḥār*. Al-Najjār later published (in 1990) a more expanded volume of his work called *al-Jazīra al-khaḍrā' wa-qaḍiyyat muthallath birmūda*. The Arabic original as well as Persian and Urdu translations have each gone through several reprintings. The book's Persian translator, 'Alī-Abkar Mahdīpūr, is also the editor of an anti-Bahā'ī collection of poems by Muḥammad Jawād Ṣāfī Gulpāyigānī (d. 1337AS/1959) (see Gulpāyigānī, *Armaghān-i Ṣāfī dar radd-i firqa-yi Bahā'ī*) and his interest in proving the Green Island as the residence of the Hidden Imām may at least in part have been motivated by his anti-Bahā'ī sentiments. Some contemporary scholars continue to support the theory that the Imām lives on the Green Island. See, for example, Eftekharzadeh, *Discussions* 69–70 (the translator amusingly renders *al-Jazīra al-khaḍrā'* as 'Greenland').

[73] Al-Najjār, *al-Jazīra* 254–255. On Marʿashī-Najafī, see Sammāk-Amānī, Marʿashī-Najafī. An association with the Bermuda Triangle was foreshadowed by the well-known East African Khoja Shīʿī scholar Mulla Haji Mohammadjaffer Sheriff Dewji (d. 1960) who stated that the Green Island "consists of a group of islands . . .situated in the middle of the White Sea to the west of England [!] . . . [A]ccording to history books the precarious whirlpools surrounding the islands have rendered it hazardous for vessels or boats to reach them." Dewji, *Imame* 94; Galian, *The Sun* 568.

[74] Al-Mīlānī, [Introduction] 20.

that the Bermuda Triangle may in fact be a military base (*markaz ḥarbī*) for the Hidden Imām.[75] The connection between the Green Island and the Bermuda triangle has been given weight in several apologetic works published in recent years by the publishing house of the Jamkarān Mosque in Iran.[76] The growing influence of Najjār's work led Lebanese Ayatollah Jaʿfar Murtaḍā al-ʿĀmilī to write an extensive work criticizing the account (*lā majāl lil-qabūl bihi wa-lā al-iʿtimād ʿalayhi bi-wajh*),[77] refuting al-Najjār's theory and declaring that the stories of the Bermuda Triangle are "nothing but superstition" (*mā hiya illā khurāfāt*).[78]

Others have argued that the Green Island exists but dismissed any attempt to associate the island with the Bermuda Triangle. For example, Jawād Muʿallim argues that there are many places in the oceans that ships and submarines have not travelled to but says that the Bermuda Triangle has nothing to do with the Green Island since to admit so would "alleviate the concerns of the enemy" who presumably are searching for the Hidden Imām to kill him.[79] Ḥasan al-Ḥusaynī al-Shīrāzī (d. 1980), the founder of the main Shīʿī center of learning in Syria stated, "The residence of Imām Mahdī and his family is the Green Island but the location of this island is not known… This does not mean that he does not move around in the cities or not meet with the people. What we do know is that when he meets with people, he does not reveal his true identity. Therefore, when he appears, some people will exclaim: "Is he the Mahdī?! We saw him before but never knew [who he was]!"[80] Ḥasan Abṭaḥī, perhaps the greatest exponent of encounters with the Hidden Imām in the late 20th century

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[75] Al-Kūrānī, Shia. Cf. a popular tract by an Egyptian journalist discussed by Stowasser, The End 60–1, claiming that the Dajjāl is plotting to conquer the world from the Bermuda Triangle.

[76] See for example, Ishtihārdī, *Ḥaḍrat-i* 52.

[77] Al-ʿĀmilī, *Dirāsa* 245. 1411/1991,

[78] Al-ʿĀmilī, *Dirāsa* 253. A condensed version of al-ʿĀmilī's book was published in 2003 (see al-ʿĀmilī, *Bayān*). In the same year, the section dealing with the Green Island was published separately, see al-ʿĀmilī, *Mādhā ʿan*. A Persian translation of al-ʿĀmilī's work is now in its sixth printing: ʿĀmilī, *Jazīra-yi*, trans. Sipihrī. Al-ʿĀmilī's work is cited by others who have criticized the account as "nothing more than a fairytale that has no truth." Yaʿqūbī, Nigāhī 355. See also Araki, *Ideological* 29, where prominent Iraqi-Iranian scholar Mohsen Araki (b. 1956), when asked about the Green Island, dismisses it as referring to a book written by a certain Murtaza Lakha: "He has used the term Jazeeera-e-Khadra (Green Island), which has no empirical evidence."

[79] Nahāwandī, *Barakāt-i* 337 (n. 2 by Muʿallim, the editor).

[80] Al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat* 142 (n. 1).

who has compiled a large tome of such stories, has left open the possibility of the existence of the Green Island.[81]

The Green Island in Shaykhī Topography

Despite these most recent attempts to renegotiate the story, as we have seen, the belief that the Hidden Imām lived in the Green Island somewhere off the coast of Spain was a visible part of what can be called Shīʿī orthodoxy in the 16th–19th centuries. With this background, we turn to the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1241/1826)[82] and Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843).[83] Al-Aḥsāʾī discussed the Green Island in one of his earliest works, a letter written circa 1206/1791–1792 to a certain Shaykh Mūsā al-Baḥrānī who had sought guidance about an itinerant ascetic who had appeared in Baghdad claiming to have visited the Green Island as the deputy (*wakīl*) of the Hidden Imām. Al-Aḥsāʾī begins his response by citing from a well-known *ḥadīth* ascribed to ʿAlī, "God will test and sift them,"[84] and praying to be protected from "delusive trials." Denouncing those he describes as ill-intentioned by nature who cast aspersions and doubts into the hearts and minds of the believers, he accuses the person claiming to have visited the Green Island of being one of the godless who use "the language of the Ṣūfīs" to feign clairvoyance and beguile the masses. Despite his disapproval, al-Aḥsāʾī nevertheless offers a metaphorical interpretation of the Green Island as a signifier of the imaginal heaven (*samāʾ al-khiyāl*) which he situates not in the physical earth but rather as the third heaven of the microcosm that is the human being. He then cites from a well-known *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and narrated on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī: "The Imām will go into hiding on the last day of the year 266 (AH) and no eye shall see him until the moment when all eyes see him" (*lā tarāhu ʿayn aḥad ḥattā yarāhu kull aḥad*).[85] He furthermore alludes to the putative final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imām from the Lesser Occultation declaring anyone who claims to see the Imām before his appearance a lying impostor.[86]

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[81] Abṭaḥī, *Anwār-i* 171. Abṭaḥī's tome is called *Mulāqāt bā imām-i zamān*, though surprisingly, the story of the Green Island is not recorded there.

[82] On him, see Lawson, Orthodoxy 128–129; MacEoin, *The Messiah* 59–106, 607–618.

[83] On him, see MacEoin, *The Messiah* 107–138.

[84] Al-Imām ʿAlī (attributed), *Nahj* 57.

[85] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* liii, 6.

[86] Al-Aḥsāʾī, *Jawāmiʿ al-kalim* i, 235–236. Al-Amīn, *Aʿyān* ii, 592, includes this letter to al-Baḥrānī in his list of al-Aḥsāʾī's works as "(93) answer to a question about someone who

Some twenty years later, in a letter written in 1811, al-Aḥsāʾī reasons that the Hidden Imām is not in the physical world during his *ghayba* but has rather ensconced himself beneath *hūrqalyā* in the imaginal realm situated between the realm of the soul and the realm of the body. The Hidden Imām passes the *ghayba* in this realm with his *hūrqalyāʾī* body. He again mentions the *ḥadīth* that no one will recognize the Imām and no eye shall behold him until all eyes behold him at his *ẓuhūr*. In the same letter, in what is likely an oblique reference to the journey by ship to the Green Island, he writes: "The creation is travelling towards (the Imām), but he is swift in his progress and has traversed the distance in an instant, whereas mankind's progress towards the primal is controlled by the divine decree at the speed of a ship with its passenger on this stagnant river called Time."[87]

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claimed to have seen the Lord of the (final) age in the Green Island." See also Momen, *The Works* 72–73 and Cole, Millennialism 291, who mistakenly identifies the letter as "Shaykh Ahmad's one extended discussion of the Mahdī." Al-Aḥsāʾī has in fact discussed the Hidden Imām extensively in several other works, many of which are now compiled in al-Aḥsāʾī, *Asrār*. Furthermore, Cole has mistranslated and thus misinterpreted a *ḥadīth* of al-Ṣādiq quoted by al-Aḥsāʾī. Cole translates the *ḥadīth* as, "He (the Qāʾim) shall vanish on the last day of the year 1266 [AH; i.e. 5 November 1850], and no eye shall behold him until all behold him." The year mentioned in the text of the *ḥadīth* is 266, not 1266.

[87] Translated as part of a longer passage in MacEoin, Some Baha'i 17 (for the original Arabic, see al-Aḥsāʾī, *Asrār* 110) and discussed in Lawson, The Qurʾan Commentary 231. On the teachings of al-Aḥsāʾī and al-Rashtī about the imaginal realm of *hūrqalyā* as the abode of the Imām, see also Corbin, *En islam* iv, 286–291; Corbin, *Histoire* 110–111 (= Corbin, *The history* 70–71); Corbin, Visionary Dream 405; Lawson, The Authority 105; Lawson, Orthodoxy 135–136; Rafati, *The Development* 107–109, 114; Momen, *An Introduction* 227; Muḥammad-Ḥusaynī, *Ḥaḍrat-i Bāb* 113; MacEoin, *The Messiah* 616, 621–622; Amanat, *Resurrection* 50–53, 59; Amanat, The Resurgence 240; Bayat, *Mysticism* 45; Hamid, The Metaphysics 41–42; Eschraghi, *Frühe Šaiḫī* 41–43; Ziai, Dreams and Dream Interpretation, 550. Cf. al-Aḥsāʾī, *Kitāb al-rajʿa* 92; al-Rashtī, *Risālat al-ṭabīb* 102; al-Rashtī, *Majmaʿ* 46; Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Qāmūs-i* ii, 1032, iv, 1630–1631. Al-Kamarahʾī suggests that *hūrqalyā* is derived from the Persian-Arabic name for Heraclius who he claims was a Greek mythical hero who evaporated and concealed himself in the world but cf. Lambden, *Some Aspects* 166–167, 208–9; Lambden, On the Possible Hebrew. Fayḍī, *Ḥaḍrat-i* 33, attributes a similar passage to al-Aḥsāʾī without furnishing the source: "When (the Imām) feared his enemies, he left this world and entered the paradise of *hūrqalyā*. He will return to this world in a different *individuum*/personification/body (*bi-ṣūrat shakhṣin min ashkhāṣihi*; lit., in the form of one of his persons)." Al-Aḥsāʾī may be using the term *shakhṣ* here in the sense of *maẓhar* or locus of manifestation, not too different from how it is used in Nuṣayrī sources as a technical term for "emanated persons who appear with the deity in each cycle" with Muḥammad representing "the most exalted of the *ashkhāṣ*," Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs* 114, 155; on *shakhṣ/ashkhāṣ* in Islamic philosophy, see I.R. Netton, Shakhṣ. Cf. Gobineau, *Trois* 305, who erroneously ascribes metempsychosis to the Shaykhī scholars by claiming that they believe the Mahdī "passe successivement dans le corps d'une série de personnages qui se tiennent pour des homes semblables à tous les autres, qui n'ont aucune prerogative particuliére et qui meurent á la façon accoutumée." It seems that Gobineau

Rashtī, al-Aḥsā'ī's student and successor, adopted a more conciliatory tone towards the narratives describing meetings with the Hidden Imām. While "simultaneously considering the last letter of the twelfth Imām and the multiple accounts of meetings with him, . . . Rashti propose[d] . . . the following syllogism: the Hidden Imām can only be seen at the End of Time, but certain people saw [him], therefore these people reached the End of Time."[88] Rashtī maintained that only through spiritual interpretation grounded in philosophy can one perceive the colorful metaphors dormant within the accounts that describe such encounters. Thus, for example, in his *Risāla fī jawāb Mullā ʿAlī Baraghānī*, Rashtī affirms: "As for the places of residence [literally, the 'cities,' *madā'in*] of the hidden Imām, the Green Isle (*al-jazīra al-khaḍrā'*) corresponds to the breast and the soul (*as-ṣadr wa-l-nafs*) and the White Sea corresponds to the lights of intelligence (*al-anwār al-ʿaqliyya*) thanks to which all cities and countries—that is all human faculties—reach their perfection in the light. These cities will be covered with greenery and waterways if irrigated by science and action."[89] Elsewhere, in his commentary on *al-Khuṭba al-ṭutunjiyya*, ascribed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, in interpreting the meaning of the seven seas mentioned in the Qur'ān, Rashtī defines the seas as symbols and signifiers of different stations or realms in which creation swims (*sābiḥ*) and praises God (*tasbīḥ*). The first sea is the White Sea which is in proximity to the Green Island which he identifies as "the land of the Qā'im in the west."[90]

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has misread statements attributed to al-Aḥsā'ī suggesting that the Qā'im is in the unborn world, the interpretation advanced by later Bahā'ī scholars, e.g., Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Qāmūs-i* iv, 1632 (*aṣlāb-i shāmikha wa arḥām-i muṭahhara*), though it should be pointed out that the term *shakhṣ* is one of the terms used in Islamic transmigration nomenclature, see Gimaret, Tanāsukh 182, who suggests silhouette as a translation for *shakhṣ*. Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 126, contends that among the masters of the Shaykhiyya, only Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1870) and Abū al-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī (d. 1969) have placed the Hidden Imām in *hūrqalyā* and that other Shīʿī thinkers such as al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī did not adhere to this belief and in fact maintained that the Imām has always been in this world with a physical body. However, al-Aḥsā'ī's writings (some of which are referenced above) are quite explicit that he understood the Hidden Imām to be in the Eight Clime during the *ghayba*. The Bāb, on the other hand, appears to have rejected both the Shaykhī doctrine of two bodies and the notion of *hūrqalyā* in at least one of his works. See his *Sharḥ duʿā* [sic] *fī ʿirfān al-ghayba*, INBA lx, 108; Eschraghi, *Frühe Šaiḫī* 43, 316; Saiedi, *Gate* 235.

[88] Amir-Moezzi, Contribution 132; Amir-Moezzi, Fin 63; Amir-Moezzi, Eschatology iii.

[89] Cited in Amir-Moezzi, An Absence 53. Cf. al-Rashtī's cosmography in *Maqāmāt* 390, where the Green Island is defined as "the realm of the soul" (*ʿālam-i nufūs*).

[90] According to al-Rashtī, in this sea, God is praised with the words, "Glorified and holy is our God, the Lord of the angels and the Spirit!" al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba* i, 278. On this locution in classical Shīʿī sources, see al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xviii, 355.

The third sea is the sea that encompasses the world described by Rashtī as "a sea with many [violent] waves and intense earthquakes. Many ships have gone under in (this sea). It has two islands: the Green Island in the west where the sons of the Qā'im reside, and an island in the east where God drowned the Pharaoh and his forces."[91] In his *al-Risāla al-jinniyya*, he situates the inhabitants of the Green Island, along with the residents of Jābulqā and Jābulsā and the thirty-nine worlds that are beyond Mount Qāf, as all being beyond the seven climes.[92]

In general, in the writings of al-Aḥsā'ī and Rashtī, we see a move from reading the Green Island literally to unpacking its perceived spiritual referents. While describing a journey outward to an unknown destination, the story is simultaneously describing a journey inward to the innermost depths of the imaginal realm, the Cockaigne of the spirit, where the Imām awaits the ardent wayfarer. The influence of their strand of interpretation can be seen in later Shaykhī scholars who have commented on the account, though at times, it is in unclear if these later thinkers have adopted their glosses or reverted to a traditional (read: literal) reading. For example, when asked whether or not the Mahdī is married and has children and if so, where they live, the Shaykhī *ʿālim* Ḥasan al-Ḥā'irī al-Iḥqāqī (d. 1421/2000), writing in 1394/1974–1975, answered in the affirmative, adding that "his residence is called the Green Island. It is far from our climes, hidden from the eyes of the like of us, but we have *ḥadīth*s about those who discovered his land and met his children and grandchildren, along with an infinite number of followers. [There are] also two great cities [where the Imām and his followers reside] in the east and the west, as indicated in the reports ascribed to him (the twelfth Imām?), called Jābulqā and Jābulṣā."[93]

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[91] Al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba* i, 278. See also al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba* i, 336–337.

[92] Al-Rashtī, *al-Risāla* 54. See also al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ qaṣīda*, fol. 252b (my thanks to Stephen Lambden for this reference).

[93] Al-Iḥqāqī, *al-Dīn* ii, 39 (no. 259). On the author, see Lambden, A Select. A spiritualized reading of the Green Island has also influenced non-Shaykhī scholars such as Ayatollah Khalīl al-Kamarah'ī (d. 1363AS/1984) who asserted that the Green Island is not one of the lands of Andalūs but is similar to the land of the Prophet al-Khiḍr/al-Khaḍir in that "everywhere he walked turned green and verdant." Immediately after advancing this interpretation, al-Kamarah'ī distances himself from the Shaykhī scholars by contending that the green land of the Imām is not *hūrqalyā* who he claims both al-Aḥsā'ī and surprisingly, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), have spoken about. Al-Kamarah'ī, *Dawāzdahumīn* 54–55. See also Nūrī, *Najm* ii, 624–5. Cf. Amini, *al-Imām* 74 [= Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i* 85], who adopts a conciliatory tone toward the ideas expressed by the Shaykhī leader Muḥammad Karīm Khān in his *Irshād al-ʿawāmm* about *hūrqalyā* so long as by *hūrqalyā* is meant "a point in this material world." More recently, the popular ayatollah, Muḥammad-Taqī Bahjat

It would only be appropriate to conclude our discussion of the Shaykhī reception of the story by reviewing the comments of Henry Corbin, the first western scholar to closely study the story of the Green Island. Corbin partially translated and glossed the story[94] and refers to the "Green Island in the middle of the Sea of Whiteness" throughout his works as the residence or domicile of the Hidden Imām.[95] For Corbin, the story of the Green Island did not take place in this world but rather in an immaterial place lacking in corporeal existence rather. This placeless place was "in the eighth climate-not in the imaginary, but in the imaginal world, that is, the world whose coordinates cannot be plotted on our maps, and where the Twelfth Imām, the 'Hidden Imām,' lives a mysterious life surrounded by his companions, who are veiled under the same incognito as (him)."[96] He thus saw the Green Island as possessing the same ontological status as the imaginal realm (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). The story of the Green Island was a recital of mystical history or *ḥikāya*, "lequel signifie une « histoire », un « récit », et comme tel une « imitation », une « répétition »."[97] Similar to al-Aḥsāʾī and Rashtī, for Corbin, the account symbolized an inward spiritual journey that took the wayfarer through the three stages of certainty [*ʿilm al-yaqīn* > *ʿayn al-yaqīn* > *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*].[98]

The Green Island in Bābī Topography

The Green Island was adopted as an epithet of the region of Māzandarān and more specifically, the Shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī and the hamlet of

(d. 1388AS/2009), when asked about the Green Island, responded: "The Green Island is the heart in which the Imām of the (final) age abides. If the Imām of the (final) age abides in your heart, [your] heart is the Green Island. The people must then circumambulate [your] heart. Are you searching for the Green Island? The Imām of the (final) age is with you. Why must we limit the Imām to that place? Know of a certainty that the Imām of the (final) age is closer to you and I than [our] jugular veins [cf. Qurʾān 50:16]." Ganjī, *Chahārdah* 69; cf. Bahjat, *Ḥikāyāt* 69.

94 Corbin, Au pays 48–68; Corbin, *En islam* iv, 346–367; Corbin, Mundus Imaginalis 23–31.

95 Corbin, *Alone* 56; Corbin, *En islam* ii, 157, 178, 189; iv, index, s.v. Ile (l') Verte en la Mer Blanche; Corbin, *Corps* 291 (n. 15) = Corbin, *Celestial* 330 (n. 15); Corbin, *Man* 58; Corbin, *The Voyage* 163.

96 Corbin, Mundus Imaginalis 21; Corbin, Au pays 45–46. Corbin seems to have influenced MacEoin who refers to the encounter with the Imām in the Green Island as a "patently other-worldly meeting," MacEoin, *The Messiah*, 14.

97 Corbin, *En islam* i, 163. On *ḥikāya*, see also Corbin, *En islam* ii, 182; iv, index, s.v. *ḥikāyat*; Corbin, *The Voyage* 164–165.

98 Corbin, *The Voyage* 164.

Badasht in the nearby province of Simnān, sites of two of the most significant episodes in early Bābī history.[99] In his famous chronicle of the early years of the Bābī movement, Muḥammad (Nabīl) Zarandī (d. 1309/1892) includes several references to the Green Island. We learn from Zarandī that when the Bāb's (d. 1266/1850) first follower, Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī (d. 1265/1849), was engaged in teaching in Mashhad, a messenger sent by the Bāb (who was at the time imprisoned in Ādharbāyjān) arrived, bearing instructions for Mullā Ḥusayn to don the Bāb's green turban, unfurl a black standard and rush with haste to "the Green Island" to assist the prominent Bābī, Muḥammad-ʿAlī Barfurūshī, known as Quddūs (d. 1265/1849),[100] who at the time was imprisoned in the north Persian town of Sārī. In a highly-charged moment laden with apocolyptic energy, Mullā Ḥusayn hoisted the Black Standard, placed the turban of the Bāb on his head, and led the Bābī march to the Green Island.[101] Since the Bāb had conferred a new name on Bushrū'ī that closely resembled his own name, the account suggests strongly that the Bāb was appointing him his locum tenens to the Green Island where another proxy, namely Quddūs, awaited him. Besides this reference, the Qajar historian Sipihr (also known as Lisān al-Mulk) (d. 1297/1880), who generally depicts the Bābīs very negatively in his chronicle, ascribes a letter from the Bāb to the band of his followers as proof that he was instigating them to fight the state in the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsī with the following sentence: "They [i.e., the Bābī fighters] will descend from the Green Island to the foot of Mount Zawrā' and kill some twelve thousand Turks." Sipihr adds that the Green Island refers to Māzandarān and Mount Zawrā' is a mountain near the village of Shāhzāda ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm, i.e. the city of Ray near modern Tehran.[102] This passage is subsequently cited in numerous anti-Bābī and

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[99] I have not found any references to Māzandarān being called the Green Island in pre-Bābī sources. The only island along the Iranian shore of the Caspian Sea is Āshūrādah. See Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma* (online edition), s.v. 'Āshūrādah'. The Caspian Sea is known as *Daryā-yi khazar* in Persian but there does not appear to be any connections between this sea and the story of the Green Island.

[100] On Quddūs, see Mohammad-Hosseini, Qoddus; MacEoin, Bārforūšī.

[101] [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers* 324–5; Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i ẓuhūr* ii, 256–9; Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i ẓuhūr* iii, 102 (n. 1), 110.

[102] Sipihr, *Nāsikh* iii, 1019; Browne, *Traveller's* 177; Amir-Arjomand, *The Shadow* 256. Al-Zawrā' is a well-known epithet of Baghdad (see Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma*, s.v. 'Zawrā') and is found in apocalyptic Traditions such as a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet predicting that a great slaughter will take place there just before the Day of Resurrection, Cook, The apocalyptic 55. Less well-know is that it is also the name of a place near the ancient city of Ray (in close proximity to modern Tehran), Ghadīmī, *Farhang-i* 361. It appears that Sipihr has the latter in mind.

anti-Bahā'ī polemical works and inaccurate or biased accounts of the early Bābī period[103] but I have not been seen it in any of the Bāb's writings accessible to me.

Elsewhere, in describing the pivotal June 1848 meeting of 81 of the Bāb's followers in the hamlet of Badasht, Zarandī writes: "Since the prophecy that when Jesus descends upon the Green Island from the sky, [his followers] would converge on that spot and help him slay the Anti-Christ was well-known amongst the lovers (of the Bāb), they became certain that the Green Island was Badasht and that Jesus was he [Bahā' Allāh] who had joined them [there]."[104] Zarandī here appears to be referring to a Shaykhī prophecy or oral tradition about the Green Island that I have thus far been unable to locate. Amanat has cited another account in his book where the Shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsī was understood by the Bābīs to be the Green island and Quddūs, the messianic spirit (*rūḥ-i masīḥā'ī*).[105] Accordingly, the Green Island was no longer a place where the Imām resides during the *ghayba*, but rather the spot upon which Jesus descends from the sky, his return (*raj'a*) to earth to assist or succeed the Qā'im having been promised in Shī'ī eschatological *ḥadīth*s. We can conclude from these accounts that in the Bābī worldview, the Green Island was transformed from an unknown location in the west to which someone had travelled to encounter the Imām to specific locations in which the promised one appeared through his proxies.

The Green Island in Bahā'ī Topography

The new and original Bābī associations with the Green Island are heightened further in Bahā'ī sources. The founder of the Bahā'ī religion, Ḥusayn-'Alī Nūrī (d. 1309/1892) (known as Bahā' Allāh) and his eldest son, successor and the authorized interpreter of his writings, 'Abbās Afandī (d. 1340/1921) (known as 'Abd al-Bahā'), appropriate the Green Island in their writings to further signify the fulfillment of messianic expectation in the person of the promised one and in the spiritual and physical topography associated

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[103] See, e.g., I'tiḍād al-Salṭana, *Fitna-yi* 22; Nīkū, *Falsafa-yi* iii, 188–189.

[104] Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i ẓuhūr* iii, 91 (citing from Zarandī's narrative); Muḥammad-Ḥusaynī, *Ḥaḍrat-i Bāb* 388; Muḥammad-Ḥusaynī, *Ḥaḍraṭ-i Ṭāhira* 276.

[105] Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i ẓuhūr* iii, 331–332; Amanat, *Resurrection* 187; Amir Arjomand, Millennial 225. Cf. Muṣṭafawī, *Muḥākama* iii, 103, who takes exception to this interpretation, pointing out that the Green Island is the residence of the Hidden Imām during the *ghayba*, and not after his appearance (!).

with him. Four locations in specific are referred to as the Green Island in their writings:[106]

1. Māzandarān: Both Bahāʾ Allāh and ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ refer to the province of Māzandarān, the native home of Bahāʾ Allāh, as the Green Island.[107]
2. Adrianople (modern day, Edirne): Bahāʾ Allāh and his family lived in this city on the westerner reaches of the Ottoman Empire for five years as exiles. Bahāʾ Allāh refers to Edirne in several of his writings as "the land we previously named the Green Island and hereafter call, the Land of Mystery."[108]
3. Acre: After his banishment to Palestine, Bahāʾ Allāh referred in several works to the holy land in general and the Prison of Acre in particular as the Green Island.[109] In a work dated 11 Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1297/23 March 1880, the prison of Acre is called "the spot that has been named the supreme horizon in the book of names, the ultimate purpose in the Green Island . . . and the Most Great Prison in the kingdom of creation."[110]
4. The Garden of Riḍwān: In particular, Bahāʾ Allāh refers to the Garden of Riḍwān in an area just outside of Acre, a location he often visited, as "Our Green Island."[111]

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[106] Raʾfatī, *Alwān* 43; Ghadīmī, *Farhang-i* 231 and the references below.

[107] Māzandarānī, *Asrār* iii, 206; ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ, *Makātīb-i* i, 170 > Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 239; Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Dāʾirat* viii, 28.

[108] [Bahāʾ Allāh], *Āthār-i* i, 417. See also [Bahāʾ Allāh], *Alwāḥ-i* 255; Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Māʾida-yi* iv, 230; Māzandarānī, *Asrār* iii, 206–207; Raʾfatī, *Alwān* 43. On the city of Edirne, see Gökbilgin, Edirne. Bahāʾ Allāh states that the city is located "behind the mountains," [Bahāʾ Allāh], *Āthār-i* vii, 92. This may be a possible allusion to the Strandzha mountain massif to the north-east of Adrianople or perhaps the Rhodope Mountains to the south-west, but cf. two others passages from Bahāʾ Allāh's writings cited in Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Māʾida-yi* viii, 28 (discussed in Alkan, *Dissent* 71) and [Bahāʾ Allāh], Barkhī 9, where he speaks of Edirne being "behind [Mount] Qāf," suggesting a cipher to refer to the presence of God's Manifestation, i.e., wherever the Manifestation of God dwells, that location is beyond Mount Qāf or the point beyond which there is no passing.

[109] Māzandarānī, *Asrār* iii, 207.

[110] Cited in Samandarī, *Āyāt-i* 202; Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Māʾida-yi* viii, 154; Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 237, 281; ʿIrfāniyān, *Nāfa-yi* 300.

[111] Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 239; Bahāʾ Allāh, *Tablets* 122, 37; Bahāʾ Allāh, *Epistle* 136 (for discussion of the last passage, see Eschraghi, *Bahaʾullah* 618). On the Garden of Riḍwān, named after the Najībiyya garden in Baghdad where in 1863, Bahāʾ Allāh disclosed to a few close disciples that he was the one whose coming the Bāb had promised, see Ruhe, *The door* 91–100; Īzadīniyā, Bāgh-i. It merits noting that the word *jazīra* denotes land between two rivers, e.g., early Arab geographers called the northern part of the territory between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers *Jazīrat aqūr* or simply *al-Jazīra* (see al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam*

All of these locations are directly associated with the Manifestation of God who in Bahāʾī sacred geography is the *axis mundis*. A key passage representing this appropriation as it were is the following where the Green Island is identified by ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ as not merely the location of the promised one but the promised one himself:[112]

> Praise be to God for having made the center of His effulgent glory, the dawning-place of His splendors, the horizon of His signs and the focal point of His mysteries—the supreme horizon, His all-glorious kingdom, His garden of refuge, His Green Island, His frequented Jābulqā and His city of Jāburṣā . . . Greetings and praise be upon the luminous temple, the all-merciful manifestation, the physically hidden one who manifested himself from the Green Island and returned to the enclosure of sanctity in the unseen realm at the moment of revelation and concealment. Greetings and praise be also upon His guides who have been set ablaze by the flaming lights and ate of the fruits of the luminous and sacred tree in that blessed isle.[113]

At the same time, a literal reading of the story of the Green Island is radically and unreservedly dismissed in the Bahāʾī writings. Before exploring this point further, some brief comments about the Bahāʾī position vis-à-vis the Shīʿī Hidden Imām are in order.

What is implicit in the Bāb's writings is made explicit in Bahāʾ Allāh's works: a wholesale rejection of dogmas prevalent in the nineteenth century Shīʿī world vis-à-vis a physically occulted Imām whose life had been miraculously prolonged by God for over a thousand years and who now resided in a distant uncharted island. Bahāʾ Allāh maintained that that due to such "stories and tales," most of the people have been deprived from approaching "the shore of the sea of oneness." He declared that these stories were either not correct to begin with or the people have failed to comprehend their meanings.[114]

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al-buldān ii, 134; Gurūh-i Jughrāfiyā, Jazīra (1); Dihkhudā, s.v. Jazīra). The Garden of Riḍwān may have been called a *jazīra* with this meaning in mind.

[112] This is a common theme in the writings of the Bāb and Bahāʾ Allāh (what can be tentatively called, *maẓhar*-ization) where the Manifestation of God is called *inter alia* the Temple, the Frequented Fane, the Garden of Repose, the Sacred Sanctuary, the Sublime Vision, the Most Great Beauty, the Supreme Horizon, the Sidrat al-Muntahā, the Masjid al-Aqṣā, the Bayt al-Ḥarām, etc. See for example, [the Bāb], *Muntakhabāt* 109. Bahāʾ Allāh himself explains that these names are honored by the Manifestation of God choosing to mention them and associate himself with them. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine* 45.

[113] ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ, *Makātīb* i, 208–209; Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 239. See also ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ, *Makātīb* i, 212, where again the Green Island is a cipher for the 'locus' of the Manifestation of God. Cf. [ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ], *Muntakhabātī* i, 227–228 [= ʿAbdu-l-Bahá', *Selections* 245–246].

[114] Bahāʾ Allāh, *Āyāt-i* ii, 31. Cf. Bahāʾ Allāh, *Adʿiyya-yi* 23.

Most of Bahāʾ Allāh's writings on the Shīʿī twelfth Imām betray a trenchant criticism of the Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* for having spread stories like the account of the Green Island. Bahāʾ Allāh rebukes the Shīʿī learned class who for having burdened the people with superstitions and lead them to await the appearance of an imaginary person from a fictitious place: They "seated an imaginary person [i.e., the Hidden Imām] on an imaginary throne and propped it with forged narrations . . . Publicly (*dar ẓāhir*), they spoke of islands (*jazāyir*), sometimes Jābulqā or Jābulsā, sometimes the false domain which they called sacred, but deep down (*dar bāṭin*) they sought fame and acclaim for themselves."[115] Elsewhere, in a letter one of his followers, the Bahāʾī scholar Mīrzā Abū al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī (d. 1332/1914), Bahāʾ Allāh avers: ". . . You are aware of what the heedless Shīʿa have said on this matter (the Qāʾim). At one point, they built the sacred domain with the hands of their superstitions. Sometimes, mention of the underground cellar (*sirdāb*) and the sea (*baḥr*) flowed from their falsifying tongues. At some other times, they spoke of Jābulqā, Jābulsā and the like. [In the end], it became evident that they were all riding on a ship of vain inclinations and galloping in a wilderness of idle fancies and corrupt imaginings." Bahāʾ Allāh maintains that the Bāb sought to tear the veils asunder so that the Shīʿa could recognize that before the Bāb, the twelfth Imām "had not been born (*dar aṣlāb* = in the unborn world; lit., in the loins)" and was not living in "imaginary, fabricated cities (*shahr-hāyi mawhūma-yi majʿūla*)."[116] In this connection, Bahāʾ Allāh states that the Shīʿa have been waiting for the Qāʾim to come from "an invented (*majʿūl*) Jābulqā and imaginary (*mawhūm*) Jābulsā."[117] Elsewhere, he maintains that everything which the Shīʿa have propounded in speaking about the Qāʾim, including a [sacred] domain (*nāḥiyya*), *tawāqīʿ*, Jābulqā, Jābulsā have been lies (*kull kidhb wa iftirā būda*).[118] Bahāʾ Allāh repeatedly states that such lies and baseless stories of the past have prevented people from recognizing the Bāb and him.[119] Characterizing the *ʿulamāʾ* as the source

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[115] Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Māʾida-yi* vii, 186. Elsewhere, in a Tablet explaining the circumstances of his writing his preeminent theological work and apologia of the Bāb, the *Kitāb-i īqān*, Bahāʾ Allāh explains that one of the questions entertained by the uncle of the Bāb concerned "the sea" and "the well-known cities," likely a reference to the two stories of the Green Island and the five islands. See Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Raḥīq-i* i, 162.

[116] Māzandarānī, *Asrār* ii, 9; Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i ẓuhūr* vi, 381. Cf. Bahāʾ Allāh, *Āyāt-i* ii, 271; Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Māʾida-yi* vii, 178; Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 440.

[117] [Bahāʾ Allāh], Collection 106.

[118] Cited in Raʾfatī, *Maʾākhidh-i* iii, 63. See also Raʾfatī, *Payk* 54–55.

[119] [Bahāʾ Allāh], Collection 23, 83; Raʾfatī, *Yādnāma* 257. Bahāʾī apologists likewise criticized the story of the Green Island, e.g., ʿAlawī, *Bayān-i* 24; Afshār, *Baḥr* 57–58 (at

of all the corruption in the world, he maintains that had it not been for the stories they fabricated, the Báb would not have been killed.

ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ further elaborated Bahāʾ Allāh's teachings on the matter in his own writings. In response to a question posed by a erudite Bahāʾī scholar from Shīrāz, he responded that prior to the Báb, the twelfth Imām "existed in the Unseen realm, but had no reality on the material plane. However, some of the Shíʿah elders of the time deemed it advisable, solely for the protection of the weak elements among the people, to portray a person existing in the Unseen realm as being possessed of a corporal existence."[120] Elsewhere, in what is likely a reference to the Green Island, he states that "each religious community is awaiting its promised one to come from a city [e.g., Jābulqā and Jābulsā], an island or some hidden realm."[121] This is why they opposed him on the day of his appearance because he did not literally fulfill any of their expectations.

Thus, over and again in their writings, employing radical hermeneutics, Bahāʾ Allāh and ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ "demythologize" the twelfth Imām and explode over a millennium of belief in his physical occultation.[122]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the most famous, if not infamous, story in the body of Shīʿī literature that describes encounters and contact with the Hidden Imām. We have seen that while the tradition of the Green Island was clearly a later invention, it was widely accepted as part and parcel of what can be called normative Twelver Shīʿī Islam for hundreds of years. It is mainly, though not only, in the last century that it has been dismissed as non-normative. Against this background, we moved to discuss the interpretations of the story found in the writings of the founder of the Shaykhī school and his successor, where the account is divested of its chiliastic tension and invested with allegorical meanings. In the process, the Green Island is transformed into, in effect, a place beyond place. From there,

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least two polemical responses were written by Shīʿī scholars to this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa* xviii, 347, xiv, 363); Ishrāq-Khāwarī, *Darj* iii, 337, who states that the Shīʿa believe in "the strange superstitions of Jābulqā, Jābulsā and the green city."

120 Translated in Faláhi-Skuce, *A Radiant* 87.

121 ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ, *Makātīb* i, 161–162.

122 I am borrowing here from Lambden's use of the term, see Lambden, The Bābī-Bahāʾī demythologization. For a discussion of other Bahāʾī writings on this theme, see Ghaemmaghami, From the Jābulqā; Khāwarī, Mawqiʿiyyat-i; Bihmardi, Lawḥ-i 176–177.

we shed light on the use of the name in Bābī and Bahā'ī sources, where the Green Island takes on further radically new connotations. In the process, we have seen how the Bahā'ī writings dramatically demythologize the Hidden Imām and deny outright all of the Shī'ī beliefs and dogmas about his existence while simultaneously appropriating a Shī'ī name and investing it with new meaning and significance.

Bibliography

Note: Whenever two dates are provided and separated by a slash (/), they denote AH (*Anno Hegirae*) and AD (*Anno Domini*), unless otherwise abbreviated by AS (*Anno Shamsi*) or BE (= Bahā'ī/Badī' Era corresponding to the Bābī/Bahā'ī solar calendar).

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PART TWO

POST-MONGOL TENDENCIES: MYSTICISM, MESSIANISM AND UNIVERSALISM

THE KŪFAN *GHULĀT* AND MILLENARIAN (MAHDIST) MOVEMENTS IN MONGOL-TÜRKMEN IRAN*

William F. Tucker

In a monograph entitled *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shiʿite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*, published in 2008, I examined the history and beliefs of four *ghulāt* (Exaggerating) sects in Umayyad (41–132/661–750 C.E.) Iraq.[1] My reason for writing the book was to demonstrate that the four groups were of greater significance both doctrinally and sociologically than had hitherto been assumed. The primary issues examined included the possible origins of beliefs (whether non-Islamic or Islamic), the accurate description of these beliefs, the nature of the sectarian leadership, the relationship with later similar movements and, most importantly, the millenarian nature of all four of the *ghulāt* sects. In particular, I suggested in several places the possibility of influence or significant parallels with the teachings, practices and millenarian aspects of religious movements, whether Shīʿī or Ṣūfī, in Mongol and Türkmen Iran (Il-Khānid as well as Timurid). The purpose of the present study is to demonstrate in greater detail the points of contiguity between the Kūfan *ghulāt* and Mongol Iranian millenarian movements: specifically the Sarbadārs, Ḥurūfiyya, Mushaʿshaʿiyya, and Nūrbakhshiyya.

In the following pages, I hope to illuminate the historical conditions in which the Mongol-era sects arose; to indicate the doctrinal influences or points of similarity with the Kūfan groups, their sectarian practices, and especially the millenarian aspects of their leadership and structure. Although the Nūrbakhshiyya and, to some degree, the Ḥurūfiyya had a clearly Ṣūfī coloration, the fact remains that the evidence available establishes that they were revolutionary chiliastic or millenarian sects with regard to their leadership and activities. Put another way, it seems clear

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[1] Tucker, *Mahdis*.

that these movements, whether Shīʿī or Ṣūfī in nature, all exhibited much the same operational profiles as the Umayyad Kūfan sects. The groups examined, while they probably had important aspects of Ṣūfism present in their doctrines, and may even at times have blurred the lines between Sunnī Islam and Shiʿite beliefs, clearly demonstrate significant elements of thought originating with the Kūfan ghulāt. Much of the information utilized in the present study comes from a series of important works by Said P. Arjomand, Shahzad Bashir, Michel Mazzaoui, John Masson Smith, Kamil al-Shaybī, chapters from Volume Six of *The Cambridge History of Iran*, the work of Ahmad Kasravi, and a range of primary sources cited or quoted in the books of the aforementioned authors.[2] It should also be noted that, as with the earlier Kūfan groups, the evidence and interpretations are not always free of contradictions or contention. It is not my intention to pursue or resolve these contested issues. Rather, I will concentrate upon the cardinal points established for these Mongol and Türkmen-era religious movements.

It is important to understand at the outset the political and social settings in which the Iraqi and later Iranian sects arose. As I pointed out in my book-length study of Iraq, the Kūfa in which the *ghulāt* appeared was a turbulent and unstable camp city beset by Arab tribal differences, uncertainty generated by military activity, and regional rivalries (Syria vs. Iraq). The instability of Kūfa fostered religio-political movements that stressed the need for charismatic and utopian figures who could transform society in the direction of greater equality and justice.[3] It seems evident that a similar sense of dislocation and unsettled conditions played an important role in the rise of the Iranian sectarian groups in the late Il-Khānid, Timurid, and Türkmen periods. The most cursory examination of works by I.P. Petrushevskii, H.R. Roemer, and John Masson Smith shows the instability of Iran during the entire Mongol-Türkmen period (650s/1250s- to ca. 906/1500).[4] Even after the destruction and loss associated with the initial conquests and the psychological shock of rule by non-Muslim overlords initially, the Mongol period saw dislocations and the disruption of normal life. And even after the Mongol rulers became

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[2] Arjomand, *Shadow*; Bashir, Imam's Return 21–30; Bashir, *Fazlallah*; Bashir, Messianic Hopes; Mazzaoui, *Origins*, Mazzaoui, Mushaʿshaʿiyan; Smith, *Sarbadār Dynasty*; al-Shaybī, *Sufism and Shiʿism*; Roemer, Successors 98–146; Amoretti, Religion 610–655; Kasravi, *Khuzistan*. Primary sources cited in these and other works will be referred to where possible and appropriate.

[3] Tucker, *Mahdis* 4–8.

[4] Petrushevskii, Serbedarov 91–162; Roemer, Successors 98–146; Smith, Sarbadār.

Muslim, there remained a gulf between the Turco-Mongol elites and the indigenous Iranian population. The reforms of Ghazan Khan indicate the unsatisfactory conditions resulting from the conduct of local Mongol officials, and one may question how effective or lasting these "reforms" were in protecting the Iranians from Mongol malfeasance, whether late Il-Khānid, Jochid, Chubanid, Timurid or Türkmen.[5] After approximately 740/1340, Iran experienced a series of clashes among different contenders for power in various parts of the country.[6] As H.R. Roemer put it:

> What has been said here of the restoration of public order, the recouping of losses due to destruction at the hands of Tīmūr, and the rebuilding of cities does not by any means imply that in Central and Western Asia under the Tīmūrids peaceful and prosperous conditions everywhere prevailed. The long reigns of Shāh Rukh, Abū Saʿīd, and Ḥusain Bāīqarā did in each case bring about a certain stabilization of affairs in comparison with earlier times and the intervening periods. Nevertheless, in view of the incessant risings, the incursions by the Türkmens in the West and the Uzbeks and the Mughals in the east, the endless succession disputes and the concomitant military movements, requisitionings and reprisals, it is not reasonable to speak of general peace and prosperity, even though the conjunction of all these things was generally confined to a few limited areas. The suffering of the people in the districts and cities affected were protracted and had long-lasting effects.[7]

Given the suggestion that conditions prior to the rule of the Timurids were chaotic, one should not be surprised to see the rise of militant messianic sectarian movements involving, particularly, the popular classes such as artisans, tradesmen, tribesmen, and rural dwellers. As in Umayyad Kūfa, so too in fourteenth-century Iran, religious leaders calling for the advent of the reign of righteousness, justice, and uncorrupted belief could expect to enjoy support from the general population. Similarly, if such leaders claimed special knowledge, magical power, or exalted spiritual status, these attributes seemed to validate their charismatic missions.

As I pointed out in *Mahdis and Millenarians*, the major ideas associated with the Kūfan *ghulāt* were: continuation of prophecy (beyond Muḥammad), allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān and religious norms, the magical use of esoteric (Bāṭinī) knowledge (Greatest Name of God

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[5] Petrushevskii, Iran under the Il-Khāns 494–537; Roemer, Successors 97.

[6] Roemer, The Jalayirids, Muzaffarids and Sarbadārs 1–41; Roemer, Timur in Iran 42–97; Roemer, Successors 97. Details of the political and military settings of the groups examined may be found in the relevant chapters of *C. H.I.*, 6.

[7] Roemer, Successors 134.

e.g.), religious elitism, violence against opponents, transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*), and successive incarnations or manifestation of God.[8] I do not mean to suggest here that all of these teachings and practices are to be found among the Mongol-Türkmen-era groups examined in this study, but it is quite clear that a number of them do play an important role in the teachings of the later movements. Furthermore, as the originators of these doctrines, the Kūfan *ghulāt* evidently played a role in the formation and crystallization of the sects highlighted in this essay. It is obviously not clear how the ideas were passed down, since extant sources do not show a well-defined chain of transmission. In this respect, it is necessary to remember the importance of oral tradition and communication; consequently, one should not expect to find the sort of documentation and genealogy associated with *ḥadīth* transmission. Also, there is a possibility that some of the written sources from earlier centuries may have been examined by elements of these movements, although here one encounters the issue of literacy or illiteracy, particularly among the rank and file members of these groups. There is no doubt, however, that elements of the Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya, and Janāḥiyya escaped the crackdown in Iraq and moved into Iran in the late Umayyad period.[9] It is probable that the Kūfan *ghulāt* teachings came down to the Mongol-Türkmen-era groups through such intermediaries as the Qarmaṭīans of southern Iraq and Bahrayn, the Khaṭṭābiyya sect, or even certain elements of the Ismāʿīlī, especially Nizāri, movement.[10] One must also enter the *caveat* that the present study concentrates on *group beliefs*, whose ideas may or may not have been exactly those of the eponymous leaders or founders of these sects. Clearly, however, they were of importance to the followers or sectarians of the groups.

With respect to the *ghulāt* ideas, one of the seemingly least similar Iranian groups is that of the Sarbadārs. In fact, as we shall see, the Sarbadārs share a fundamental and crucial feature, a violent commitment to the advent of the Mahdī and the transformation of the world associated with this figure. The history of the Sarbadārs is complex and convoluted, since it involves several figures and constituencies. As Arjomand points out, the origin of the Sarbadār political activity and state organization is

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[8] Tucker, *Mahdis* 109–110.

[9] Tucker, *Mahdis* 55, 92–94.

[10] Tucker, *Mahdis* 83, 87, 110, 113–117. For a more detailed and organized examination of the Khaṭṭābiyya, one should consult Christopher J. Wright, *Abu al-Khattab, the Khattabiyya, and the Kufan Ghulat*.

associated with the appearance, in the early fourteenth century, of a Ṣūfī "preacher" named Shaykh Khalīfa in the vicinity of Sabzawār in Khurāsān.[11] His messianic and egalitarian socio-political teachings antagonized the *'ulamā'* establishment and led to his murder. The Sarbadārid movement had already surfaced in this area, thanks to the action of one Amīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq, an Iranian who had arisen against putative Il-Khānid rule. After ʿAbd al-Razzāq's murder at the hands of his brother, Masʿūd, the latter replaced his brother as the leader of the Sarbadārs, who were in revolt against Il-Khānid rule. In 738/1338 Masʿūd entered into an alliance with an individual named Ḥasan Jūrī, who had replaced Shaykh Khalīfa as head of a group of "dervish" followers.[12] After Ḥasan Jūrī's death, Shams al-Dīn ʿAlī, a successor to the leadership of the sectarian group led by Shaykh Khalīfa and Ḥasan, ruled from 737/1347 to 745/1353. Through a series of alliances the last Sarbadārid ruler, ʿAlī Muʿayyad, governed until 783/1381.[13]

The sectarian organization, Shaykhiyya-Jūriyya (after Shaykh Khalīfa and Ḥasan Jūrī) is, of course, the primary concern to us here. The Sarbadār movement was, as noted previously, a combination of Shīʿī and Ṣūfī belief and practice. The emphasis was upon the expected Mahdī, who would usher in the utopia of harmony and justice. The leaders stressed, as with the Kūfan *ghulāt*, the *imminent* appearance of the hidden Imām after the time of "concealment."[14] Shaykh Ḥasan taught that the believers should arm themselves and prepare for the Mahdī's arrival.[15] The militancy and preparation for a violent resolution to an unsatisfactory present is precisely the attitude and actions found among the Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya, and Janāhiyya in Kūfa. It is also important to note a parallel between the Qarmaṭīans (*ghulāt* influenced) and the Sarbadārs. Both the Qarmaṭīans and the Sarbadārs kept horses fully saddled and prepared for the use of the Mahdī on the day of return.[16] Although one may plausibly argue that this Mahdī concept is simply a Twelve-Imām or moderate Imāmi belief, it seems that the military preparations and call for force in support of the Mahdī is far more akin to the violence and force utilized by the Mughīriyya and Manṣūriyya warriors emanating from Kūfa. Another parallel with

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[11] Arjomand, *Shadow* 69–71.

[12] Smith, *Sarbadār* 108–112; Arjomand, *Shadow* 69–70.

[13] Arjomand, *Shadow* 69–70; Smith, *Sarbadār* 145–155.

[14] Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Cinq Opuscules*, text 16–22. Arjomand, *Shadow* 70–71; Smith *Sarbadār* 56.

[15] Smith, *Sarbadār* 56.

[16] Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, text 52. For the Qarmaṭīans, see Ibn al-Jawzī, *Naqd al-ʿIlm wa-l-ʿulamā'* 102. Amoretti, Religion 613; al-Ghamedi, *Qarmatians* 53; Smith, Sarbadār 146, Melville, Sarbadārids 47–49.

the Kūfans lies in the inculcation of a sense of religious elitism, which seems to have been fostered by the call to the band of followers to arm themselves and stand ready to assist the Mahdī in the imposition of the New Order. Clearly, this feeling of militant unity and power are far more characteristic of *ghulāt* millenarians than the relatively moderate and frequently quiescent Twelvers.

The relationship between the Kūfan *ghulāt* and the Mongol-Türkmen-era sects becomes much clearer in the case of the Ḥurūfiyya, a religious group founded by Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī in northwestern Iran toward the end of the fourteenth century. Faḍl Allāh (d. 796/1394) was born in Astarābād, Iran, and after serving as a *qāḍī* (Muslim judge), a post which he inherited from his father, he relinquished the judgeship and became an itinerant mystical seeker traveling mostly in northern Iran, but also Shirwān and Arabia.[17] Faḍl Allāh's religious vocation appears to have stemmed from not only mystical practice, but also a series of dreams occurring between ca. 775/1374 and 796/1387.[18]

In addition to the content of his own dreams, Faḍl Allāh came to be noted for his interpretation of the dreams of his followers and others.[19] On the basis of this and other spiritual experiences he began to articulate a set of esoteric and complex beliefs which came to form the crux of the teachings of the Ḥurūfiyya (the letter people), named after one of the key components of his system. These beliefs largely emerged after a mystical experience he is said to have had in the city of Tabriz at some time around the age of forty.[20] Then, as Said Arjomand puts it:

> He retired to seclusion in Isfahan until a dying dervish announced to him that the time of the revelation of divine glory (*ẓuhūr-i kibriyā*) had come (ca. 1386). He then made his public proclamations, began writing the *Jāvīdān-nāmeh (*Book of Eternity), and formed the Ḥurūfī sect. 'This is the new ordinance'; thus Faḍl Allāh refers to his teaching in his testament.[21]

In the course of his teaching and increasingly political activity, Faḍl Allāh wrote several other works: *The Book of Sleep* (*Nawmnāma*), this in the Astarābādī dialect of Persian like the aforementioned *Jāwidān-Nāma*; *The Book of Love* (*Maḥabbatnāma*); a narrative poem *The Book of the*

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[17] Bashir, Enshrining Divinity 290.
[18] Bashir, Enshrining 290–291; Bausani, Ḥurūfiyya 600.
[19] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 16–18.
[20] Arjomand, *Shadow* 72.
[21] Arjomand, *Shadow* 72; see also Mir-Kasimov, Jāvdān-Nāma 603–605; Mir-Kasimov, Racine RḤM 9–34.

Divine Throne (*ʿArshnāma*); and a collection of verse (*Dīwān*). All of these are useful for any examination of his doctrines and were to be influential among those who followed his teachings.[22] As his preaching became more provocative to various Muslim scholars in cities and regions such as Samarqand and Gīlān, the authorities took note (if they had not before!) and arrested him in the city of Shamakha in Azerbaijan.[23] The governor of the region, Mīrān-Shāh, a son of Timur Lenk, ordered his execution, which took place on September 2, 796/1394.[24] His followers continued to propagate his teaching long after his death, and, eventually, the Ḥurūfiyya became fairly numerous in Iran as well as in the Ottoman Empire, where they played a role of importance in literature and religious thought.[25]

Faḍl Allāh's teachings and Ḥurūfī thought in general are extremely complicated and oftentimes difficult to explain in a straightforward fashion. The following is an attempt to provide a coherent summary, primarily for the purpose of identifying the elements which seem traceable to the Kūfan *ghulāt*. The major features of Faḍl Allāh's teachings begin with his belief that he has been given a Divine Revelation from which comes a cycle of the manifestation of the Divine in human beings, himself included. At various times, he claimed to be divine, to be the Mahdī, and to be the returned Jesus.[26] In effect, Faḍl Allāh claimed to be at least a Prophet and possibly even beyond that.[27] The information for these assertions comes from Hamid Algar's article in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, based upon the important late work of (as Algar transliterates it) Abdülmecid Firişteoğlu, *Işknâme-i Ilâhî*, published in Istanbul in 1881, 13–17. As a prophet, he was the bearer of God's final truths about Divinity, and to him the truths of the universe were revealed. God as the first cause manifested Himself originally in the *Kalimāt* (The Words). The original *Kalimāt* or Words were then expressed in the letters of the Arabic alphabet (twenty-eight) and the thirty-two letters of the Persian alphabet. These letters were initially the pronounced or expressed Word of God. According to Faḍl Allāh, God then gave to the prophets a revelation of Himself through the medium of these letters and established their role as the elements from which the earth was created. Human beings were able, then, through the prophetic revelations, to

[22] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 129–130.
[23] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 37–39.
[24] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 43–49.
[25] Algar, Horufism 486–487; Bashir, *Fazlallah* 86–107.
[26] Algar, Horufism 483–484; Bausani, Ḥurūfiyya 601.
[27] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 25–26.

know God by means of the mystical interpretation of these letters in combinations in words and even their objectification in objects such as the human body, especially the face, which showed the name of God written in clear letters.[28] These letter combinations, in short, led to the existence of the world of consciousness and perception.

In Faḍl Allāh's thought God is manifest within the physical world through words, sounds, and letters. Man has knowledge of the thirty-two letters and, in this sense, takes on the identity of God and is one with the universe made up of the elements fire, water, earth, and air. This latter belief leads Faḍl Allāh to posit the eternity and infinity of the universe. Within the universe God reveals his grace through messengers. The revelations come in three cycles: (1) prophecy (*nubuwwa*), (2) guardianship (*wilāya*), and (3) Godship (*ulūhiyya*). The cycle of prophecy stopped with Muḥammad, while the period of guardianship began with ʿAlī and ended with the Twelfth Imām-Mahdī, with whom Faḍl Allāh identified. Faḍl Allāh thus completed the guardianship era, and, with his revelation or teaching, the era of divinity began and would end with an imminent apocalypse. As the receptacle of full knowledge of the letters and thus divine knowledge, Faḍl Allāh, who claimed descent from the seventh Imām, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, would be the Mahdī who ushered in end times and the apocalypse.[29] Although there may be some question as to whether Faḍl Allāh's own preserved texts mention the previous ideas, there is no doubt that other Ḥurūfī sources attribute these beliefs to him, and therefore it is certain that at least a portion of the Ḥurūfiyya professed these teachings (see note 29). Faḍl Allāh's knowledge and divine stature also came to have important implications for his followers. The Ḥurūfiyya came to believe that knowledge of their leader was knowledge of God's Word and, therefore, knowledge of Paradise itself. Conversely, ignorance of Faḍl Allāh's message and essence constituted Hell. The corollary of this was that whoever acknowledged Faḍl Allāh's teaching could forego the normal religious obligations, e.g. fasting, praying, etc., and act as though everything was lawful for him.[30]

As one may gather from the previous paragraphs, the teachings of Faḍl Allāh and the Ḥurūfiyya have many points of resemblance and continuity

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[28] Browne, Some Notes on the Literature 70–71.

[29] Khwāja Sayyid Isḥāq, *Maḥramnamā* in Huart, *Textes persans* 21–23; Algar, Horufism 485 based upon Firişteoğlu, *Işknâme-i Ilâhî* 13–17; Bashir, Enshrining Divinity 292–293; Bausani, Ḥurūfiyya 600–601; see also Rafati, Ḥurūfīs 19–20.

[30] Browne, Some Notes on the Literature 76–78; Rafati, Hurūfīs 20–21.

with the four *ghulāt* sects of Kūfa. Although I argue this in my book, the same link has been amply noted by Kamīl al-Shaybī in his work on Shīʿism and Ṣūfism, as may be seen from the following passages:

> In dealing with the relationship between the Ḥurūfīs and Shīʿites, one should first point out the great resemblance of Faḍl Allāh to the extremist leaders. Actually, Faḍl Allāh reminds one of al-Mughira ibn Saʿid, who considered God in the form of the letters. In regarding himself as the manifestation of Christ, Faḍl Allāh was like Abu Mansur al-ʿIjli, who taught that Adam was the first human being and Christ the second. Another resemblance of Faḍl Allāh to Abu Mansur comes from the fact that both claimed to have been God's messengers for the purpose of allegorical interpretation.
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> There were other extreme ideas prevailing in the Ḥurūfī doctrine. Bayan ibn Samʿan, as already shown, referred to the idea that God's face was His only immortal member on which the Ḥurūfis depended completely to show that Adam was the face of God. The extremists were also the teachers of the Ḥurūfīs in claiming that believers did not die and that death meant a removal from one home, namely, the material world, to another, namely the spiritual world. The belief in the Second Coming and *Mahdiyya* was another characteristic common to both Sufis and extremists. Just as Abu 'l-Khattab became a god after his death, so Faḍl Allāh was described as "The Lord of Lords" (*Rabb al-Arbab*).[31]

In addition to the features pointed out by al-Shaybī, one may also discern Ḥurūfiyya similarities with ʿAbd Allāh b. Muʿāwiya and the Janāḥiyya, including the belief that the Divine was incarnate in Ibn Muʿāwiya. In addition to this, the Janāḥiyya, like the Ḥurūfiyya, asserted that whoever acknowledged the Imām could do as he chose, another instance of the antinomianism so prevalent among *ghulāt* groups.[32]

The Ḥurūfiyya sectarians survived the death of their leader and engaged in a number of violent actions in the fifteenth century. On February 21, 830/1427, a Ḥurūfī believer attacked and wounded the Timurid ruler Shāhrukh (d. 850/1447). Some four to five years later, Ḥurūfīs staged a rebellion in Iṣfahān, while in 845–846/1441–42 suspicion of Ḥurūfīs led by Kalīmatallāh al-ʿUlyā, Faḍl Allāh's daughter, led to a massacre of this woman and followers in Tabriz.[33] Finally, although outside the scope of this essay, the further history of the Ḥurūfīs is bound up with the history of the Ottoman Empire, where Faḍl Allāh's disciples had spread his message. Ḥurūfī ideas and actions were to play a significant role in Ottoman

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[31] al-Shaybī, *Sufism* 212.
[32] al-Rāzī, *Iʿtiqādāt* 59; Shahrastānī, *Milal*, I, 152; Tucker, *Mahdis* 102–103.
[33] Bashir, *Fazlallah* 101–107.

lands, gaining numerous adherents and exerting considerable influence upon Ṣūfī orders such as the Bektashis and even some of the *ʿulamāʾ*.[34]

If the Ḥurūfiyya were a collection of Iranian and, later, Turkish dervishes focused upon cabbalistic interpretation of the Arabic/Persian alphabets, the Mushaʿshaʿiyya movement was, in fact, a religious body manifested in an Arab tribal army. The leader and founder of this movement was Sayyid Muḥammad b. Falāḥ ibn Hibāt Allāh Mushaʿshaʿ (d. 865/1461 or 866/1462). Born in Wāṣit (at the beginning of the fifteenth century), Mushaʿshaʿ (the "Radiant" or "Ray of Light") claimed descent from the seventh Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim and went, at the age of seventeen or so, to the important Shīʿī center of learning, Ḥilla in Iraq, to study with the important Twelver scholar Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥillī (d. 841/1437 or 1438). Becoming proficient in Shīʿī doctrine over a period of years, the Mushaʿshaʿ also cultivated Ṣūfī techniques and practices. In 840–841/1436–37 Mushaʿshaʿ proclaimed himself to be the Mahdī and apparently turned to al-Ḥillī for support. Al-Ḥillī not only repudiated this claim but apparently even issued a fatwa for Mushaʿshaʿ's death, whereupon the latter turned against his erstwhile teacher.[35]

What happened next, according to an account from Michel Mazzaoui's important study of the Mushaʿshaʿiyya, is that Mushaʿshaʿ moved from Wāṣit (Iraq) to southern Iraq. There he preached to and gained the support of Arab tribes and others, including the Banū Sulāma, the Ṭayy, the Nays (a clan of the Maʿādi tribe and the Sudān. Eventually he and his followers settled in Huwayza in Khūzistān and from there began militant actions against neighboring areas and against the Qaraquyunlu Türkmen and the Timurids, who were struggling for suzerainty in this region.[36]

At Huwayza Mushaʿshaʿ and his son Mawlā ʿAlī established themselves and continued to spread their message among the Arab tribes in Khūzistān and southern Iraq, in this way mirroring much of what the Qarmaṭīans had done centuries earlier. As Ahṃad Kasravi pointed out years ago, Shīʿism was popular in Iraq and parts of Iran in the fifteenth century, so Mushaʿshaʿ's efforts were rewarded with an increasing number of followers.[37] The Mushaʿshaʿiyya began a series of raids, taking advantage of the Qara-Qoyunlu-Timurid squabbles, attacking such places as Baṣra,

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[34] Ocak, *Zindikler 106–135*.

[35] Shūshtarī, *Majālis* 395–396; Bashir, Imam's Return 22–24.

[36] ʿAzzāwī, *Taʾrīkh al-ʿIrāq*, III, 111–113; Mazzoui, Mushaʿshaʿiyān 145–148; Bashir, Imam's Return 22–24.

[37] Kasravi, *Khuzistān* 16.

Najaf, and even Baghdad.[38] Mawlā ʿAlī was killed by a Qaraquyunlu force in May, 861/1457, and his father, Mushaʿshaʿ died in 866/1462 (although some say 869/1465).[39]

The Mushaʿshaʿiyya continued their rule and activities under the leadership of Mushaʿshaʿ's son Sulṭān Muḥammad. Their power spread into other areas such as Luristan, Jazā'ir and even around Baghdad.[40] After Mushaʿshaʿ's death, his younger son, Mawlā Muḥsin (d. 906/1500 or 914–915/1508–09), took over the movement and held and even expanded the areas controlled by the Mushaʿshaʿiyya.[41] The Safavids had by this time become the major power in Iran, so the Mushaʿshaʿiyya had to content themselves with a more moderate religious stance and a more quiescent political role.[42] As Dr. Bashir puts it: "Although paying tribute to Safavid, Afghan, Qajar, and Ottoman dynasties at various times, Mushaʿshaʿ's descendants continued to be influential in the region until the twentieth century."[43] The religious beliefs of the Mushaʿshaʿiyya, although much less convoluted than those of the Ḥurūfiyya, still present the researcher with some uncertainty. The primary issue concerns whether certain ideas were those of Mushaʿshaʿ, his son Mawlā ʿAlī, those of their Mushaʿshaʿ followers, or all of them together. Taking into account this complication, we may proceed to delineate as clearly as possible the teachings.

First of all, the name "Mushaʿshaʿ," "the radiant," is a name he assumed upon beginning his mission among the Arab tribes at Khūzistān. The light image is interesting in view of the role of light in al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd's light imagery, according to which God is a man of light with a crown of light on His head.[44] One should also note in passing the use of light in another religious leader (to be discussed further in this essay), Muḥammad "Nūrbakhsh" ("Giver of light"), a name bestowed on this man by his spiritual master.[45] Although light imagery is to be found among many sectors of Islam, it is interesting to note how prevalent it is in Shīʿism.

Having begun his religious quest as a student of the respected Twelver Aḥmad al-Ḥillī, Sayyid Muḥammad Mushaʿshaʿ seems to have become

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[38] Bashir, Imam's Return 23–24.
[39] Bashir, Imam's Return 24.
[40] Luft, Mushaʿshaʿ 672.
[41] Bashir, Imam's Return 24.
[42] Ghaffārī, *Jahān Ārā* 272.
[43] Bashir, Imam's Return 24.
[44] Anon., *al-Sawaʿiq*, India Office Ms., Delhi 916, fol. 16a; Tucker, *Mahdis* 60.
[45] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 41.

interested in magical practices and the performance of miracles.[46] In this respect it must be noted that his followers were said to have magical power by which, having fallen in a trance, they could lie upon spears or swords without suffering harm.[47] The use of magic words and practices harkens back to the teachings of the Kūfan leaders Bayan b. Samʿān and al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd.[48] Their magical or occult practices appear to have encouraged the Mushaʿshaʿ to move beyond simple Twelver teachings to concepts more clearly identifiable with the Kūfan *ghulāt*, e.g. the belief that all the prophets and Shīʿī Imāms only died metaphorically.[49] The Imāms' Bodies were supposedly veils of God, and this idea, according to Bashir, is related to a "theory of metempsychosis" (*tanāsukh*), whereby the souls of "saints" (Awliyyā) are in the presence of God after death, while the souls of the damned are sent back to earth in other bodies.[50] Yet again we see a Kūfan *ghulāt* concept, e.g. among the Janāḥiyya.[51]

One of Mushaʿshaʿ's most important assertions, however, was, at first, that he was related to the Mahdī and then that he was himself the Mahdī.[52] A modern author, Jāsim Shubbār, argues that Mushaʿshaʿ never said directly that he was the Mahdī, but this seems to contradict the available evidence and might well be grounded in Shubbār's belief that Mushaʿshaʿ remained a moderate Twelver teacher.[53] By all indications, Mushaʿshaʿ not only declared himself to be Mahdī, but also to be the exoteric aspect of the 12th Imām and also of the rank of the Prophets and *Walīs*, guardians.[54] Mawlā ʿAlī, Mushaʿshaʿ's son, apparently advanced even more extreme claims, asserting that he was the reincarnation of ʿAlī and that he (Mawlā ʿAlī) was God.[55]

As one may readily observe, these claims of Mushaʿshaʿ and Mawlā ʿAlī harken back yet again to the Kūfa extremists. The identification with the Twelfth Imām, the claim to prophetic or guardian rank, the assertion of being ʿAlī's reincarnation, and the claim to outright divinity of ʿAlī all stem ultimately from doctrines of the Kūfan sects. They can be recognized in

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46 Mazzaoui, Mushaʿshaʿiyān 152.
47 Khwandamīr, *al-Siyār* 586.
48 Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʿāt al-Zamān*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms Pococke 371, fol. 139a; Kashshī, *Rijāl* 196; Tucker, *Mahdis* 47, 53–54.
49 Kasravi, *Khuzistān* 23–27; Bashir, Imam's Return 24–25.
50 Bashir, Imam's Return 25.
51 al-ʿĪjī, *Mawāqif*, VIII 386; Tucker *Mahdis* 102.
52 Shūshtāri, *Majālis* 396.
53 Shubbār, *Taʾrīkh* 30.
54 Mushaʿshaʿ, *Kalām al-Mahdī*, translated quotation in Mazzaoui, Mushaʿshaʿiyān 154.
55 Shūshtāri, *Majālis* 400; Kasravi, *Khuzistān* 19; Mazzaoui, Mushaʿshaʿiyān 154.

the teachings of Bayān, al-Mughīra, Abū Manṣūr, and the followers of Ibn Muʿāwiya.[56] Furthermore, the armed raids and military operations reflect the recourse to violence seen in the actions of the Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya, and Janāḥiyya.[57]

The fourth Mongol-Türkmen era group to be investigated is the Nūrbakhshiyya, aptly characterized as a "Shiʿi offshoot of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order, which functioned for part of its existence as a distinct sect because of the intermittent claims to the status of Mahdī by Sayyid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh Nūrbaksh."[58] Sayyid Muḥammad, born in Qūhistān, Khurasān in 795/1392, became a disciple of the Kubrawī master, Khwāja Isḥāq Khuttalānī, while still a teenager. He took up residence in Khuttalān, the center of Khuttalānī's religious circle. Master Khuttalānī gave his disciple the title "Nūrbakhsh," giver of light, as a mark of his excellence in his studies. In about the year 826/1423, Sayyid Muḥammad announced that he was the expected Mahdī, this coming in the midst of a "complicated political situation."[59] Sayyid Muḥammad's Mahdī claim landed him and his teacher Khuttalānī in the jail of the local Timurid governor and eventually in the prison of Shāhrukh, the Timurid ruler of Iran at this time. Sayyid Muḥammad was detained for half a year, but his master, Khuttalānī, was not so fortunate and, not long after being transferred to the Timurid ruler, was executed.[60] After being released from prison, Sayyid Muḥammad travelled to southern and southwestern Iran, where his proselytizing activities caused him to be returned to prison in Herat, and he was forced to publicly recant his teachings in 839/1436. Eventually, after another imprisonment, he was able to move to Gīlān (northern Iran), for a decade or so (840–850/1437–47) and then, after the death of his nemesis, the Timurid Shāhrukh, he settled in the north Iranian village of Suliqan, near the city of Rayy where he died in 869/1464. His work was continued by his sectarian followers as well as his descendants. The Nūrbakhshiyya carried on their work in Iran but also spread into Anatolia and eventually established themselves in Kashmir.[61]

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[56] Tucker, *Mahdis* 30, 102, 114.

[57] Tucker, *Mahdis* 54–56, 82–83, 122–124.

[58] Algar, Nurbakhshiyya 134.

[59] DeWeese, Eclipse of the Kubraviyah in Central Asia 59–83; Bashir, Imam's Return 26. For the most complete and sophisticated examination of Sayyid Muḥammad and the Nūrbakhshiyya, one must consult Bashir's *Messianic Hopes*.

[60] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 49–50.

[61] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 161–243.

Nūrbakhsh's religious ideas were an interesting amalgamation of Twelver Shīʿī, Ṣūfī, and *ghulāt* doctrines. One can gauge something of his teaching from a number of treatises he composed over his lifetime, probably the most significant of these being a treatise entitled *Risālat al-hudā* (*Treatise on Guidance*), written apparently between 1447 and 1454.[62] Basing himself on Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* references, as well as classical Ṣūfī thinkers, Nūrbakhsh puts forth his view of the nature and role of the Mahdī and the justifications for claiming that role for himself. The Mahdī, Nūrbakhsh maintains, who possesses the ultimate secret knowledge, will come at any time and bring peace and justice to all of the believers.[63]

Sayyid Muḥammad provides a number of reasons for calling himself the Mahdī. He refers to *ḥadīths* from the Prophet, saying that one must know the Imām in order to attain salvation and saying that the Imām will bear the name Muḥammad and the nickname "Nūr" (light). Another *ḥadīth* reports that the Prophet said the Mahdī would come from the lineage of Fāṭima through Ḥusayn and would have a birthmark on his face. Nūrbakhsh argues that he personally possesses both of these attributes. The Mahdī will establish a new Islamic order, and his armies will conquer the world and bring economic justice.[64] The account goes on to say that the Mahdī will be from the House of the Prophet, but his mother will be Iranian, because only he can unify Arabs and Persians. The Mahdī will return in the ninth century of the *hijra* (fifteenth century C.E.), which apparently the Shīʿī scholars derived from the Name of God, where every letter has a numerical value. Nūrbakhsh claimed that he possessed all the attributes of the Mahdī: he was the most knowledgeable *ʿAlim* of the time; he was from the House of the Prophet, although with an Iranian mother; he was the Imām of the Twelvers; and he was living in the predicted century, both of the Mahdī's return and the time of "non-believer" rulers (the Mongols), who were governing oppressively and violently.[65]

The remarks about the Mahdī and the Imām seemingly reflect Twelver views until one considers that Nūrbakhsh's claims for himself seem much more consonant with Kūfan teachings, for example, Bayān's claim to be the Imām through designation by an ʿAlid.[66] Similarly, a segment of the

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[62] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 68.
[63] Nūrbakhsh, *Risāla*, in Bashir, *Between Mysticism*, Ph.D. diss. 274–304.
[64] Nūrbakhsh, *Risāla*, in Bashir, *Between Mysticism*, Ph.D. diss. 274–304.
[65] Nūrbakhsh, *Risāla*, in Bashir, *Between Mysticism*, Ph.D. diss. 274–304.
[66] Tucker, *Mahdis* 48.

Mughīriyya recognized the Imāmate of Mughīra himself.[67] Nūrbakhsh also elaborated a system of cosmology involving different levels of light, one aspect of which is said to be a property of God's essence.[68] Although light is not exclusively a Shīʿī image, one should recall here al-Mughīra's emphasis upon light imagery and its association with the nature of God.[69]

Even though Nūrbakhsh's followers are usually depicted as being simply Ṣūfī adepts, it is instructive to note, as Bashir points out, that some of them were said to have belonged to antinomian Ṣūfī groups in the Islamic East during the fifteenth century.[70] Antinomianism, as seen previously, was a prime feature of the Kūfan *ghulāt* groups, whether through nullification of exoteric ritual law because of knowledge of the Imām, or through allegorical interpretation of religious duties or prohibitions.[71]

As may be seen in the preceding pages, the Mongol-Türkmen-era movements shared many concepts derived from the Kūfan *ghulāt* sects such as the Bayāniyya, Mughīriyya, Manṣūriyya, and Janāḥiyya. The Mongol-period sects would have their analogues in the centuries to come, in the form of the ʿAlawites (Nuṣayrīs), a *ghulāt* group whose origins go back to the 8th or 9th century C.E. (but who, unlike most *ghulāt* sects, exist to this very day in Syria), as well as the Bektashis, and Qizilbāsh in Iran, to mention a few.[72] It is also possible to see significant parallels with an Iranian extremist group of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Nuqṭawiyya (the "dot people"), an offshoot of the Ḥurūfiyya. Their intellectual founder and leader was an Iranian named Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī (d. 1427). The teachings of Pasīkhānī were a combination of those already encountered among the Kūfan *ghulāt*, and those of the Mongol-Türkmen movements. Like the Mughīriyya and Ḥurūfiyya, Pasīkhānī analyzed the Qurʿan and the *ḥadīth* through examining the letters of the Arabic and Persian alphabets, adding to this his major, original idea that the letters represent a number of dots (*nuqṭa*s) which constitute this world, the world of the angels, and the differentiation of the consonants within the letters. Pasīkhānī also claimed to be the Mahdī, and then went so far as to assert that he was the Divinity

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67 Nawbakhtī, *Firaq* 83; Tucker, *Mahdis* 59.
68 Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 121.
69 Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām* viii, 199; Tucker, *Mahdis* 60.
70 Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 69.
71 Tucker, *Mahdis* 124.
72 Two major sources for the ʿAlawites/Nuṣayrīs, including translated extracts from original writings, are: Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* and Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis* 284–355; Moosa, *Extremist Shiʿites.*

incarnate. Apparently, at some point, he also claimed to be a prophet.[73] *Tanāsukh* (transmigration of souls) also figured prominently in his teachings. All of these doctrines became the basis of the Nuqṭawiyya sect's belief system.[74] The Mahdī idea, the alphabet speculation, and, certainly, the Incarnation belief all reflect a clear continuity and relationship with the Kūfan sects and with the groups of the Mongol-Türkmen era.

For that matter, Ismāʿīl I, founder of the Safavid dynasty, before his sobering defeat at the Battle of Chaldiran (920/1514), espoused ideas far more in accord with *ghulāt* teachings than with the Twelver Imām Shīʿism that he later imposed upon Iran and which remains the dominant religion to this day. If one examines the excellent translation and study of Ismāʿīl's poetry by V. Minorsky, one encounters numerous concepts and poetic images seemingly derived from *ghulāt* thought as mediated through Ṣūfī poetic practice. This is perhaps best illustrated in poem No. 15, in Minorsky's work, as follows:

> My name is Shāh Ismāʿīl. I am God's mystery. I am the leader of all these ghazis.
> My mother is Fāṭima, my father is ʿAlī; and eke I am the Pīr of the Twelve Imāms.
> I have recovered my father's blood from Yazīd. Be sure that I am of Ḥaydarian essence.
> I am the living Khiḍr and Jesus, son of Mary. I am the Alexander of (my) contemporaries.
> Look you, Yazīd, polytheist and the adept of the Accursed one, I am free from the Kaʿba of hypocrites.
> *In me is Prophethood (and) the mystery of Holiness.* I follow the path of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā.
> I have conquered the world at the point of (my) sword. I am the Qanbar of Murtaḍā ʿAlī.
> My sire is Ṣafī, my father Ḥaydar. Truly I am the Jaʿfar of the audacious.
> I am a Ḥusaynid and have curses for Yazīd. I am Khatāʾī, a servant of the Shāh's.

When one adds to this Ismāʿīl's belief in the divinity and reincarnation of ʿAlī, as well as his own appearance in the world after having abided with God, it is clear that we are looking yet again at the *ghulāt* tradition which emerged in Kūfa centuries earlier.[75]

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[73] Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 70–150.

[74] Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*.

[75] V. Minorsky and Shāh Ismāʿīl I, The Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl I, 1026a, 1042a. My emphasis in line 6.

In the final analysis, however, the primary connection among all these groups of whichever period is the presence of millenarian sectarianism. As I stressed repeatedly in my monograph, a millenarian movement consists of a group of individuals who expect an imminent, collective, frequently sudden salvation in this present world.[76] The sectarian groups examined in that study, as well as the Iranian movements analyzed in this essay all expected a total transformation from a world of oppression and religious error to a utopian community of *all* believers. The nature of the Mahdī and his mission for the Kūfan *ghulāt* and the religious groups and figures was the same. It was an activist, world-transforming task. The Mahdī's mission was to establish the new, just order in this world, *not just to prepare for the Apocalypse and the next world*. The new world would not simply materialize all of a sudden; it would have to be achieved through revolutionary force and, where deemed necessary, violence. A charismatic leader, the Mahdī, would spearhead this effort through the militant support of a charismatic community of believers (the sectarian partisans).[77] It should be emphasized that the nature and status of religious leaders such as Faḍl Allāh were defined as much by how their believers perceived them as by anything they themselves did or wrote. Through the reflected charisma of the leader, the millenarian groups would set themselves apart as the "true believers," who had to wage unrelenting action against the forces of evil, i.e. those outside the group. Antinomianism was another component of these sects. Knowledge of the Imām-Mahdī and allegorical interpretation of religious texts and norms all contributed to the nullification of normal religious practice or law. It may be argued that such figures as the Mushaʿshaʿ simply substituted an alternative vision of *Sharīʿa* law. In any case, however, the point to be underscored is that the normal ritual conduct and legal norms were to be set aside! Finally, an essential key to these movements' existence was the words and deeds of a messianic leader—a feature common to all the extremist Shīʿites of whatever era or country.[78]

In conclusion, the essential purpose of all of these remarks is to demonstrate that the Kūfan *ghulāt* were the original source of virtually all *ghulāt* Shīʿī ideas adopted by numerous groups all the way down to the present. The inescapable conclusion is that the Kūfan sects provided the template for succeeding Shīʿī and Shīʿī-derived *ghulāt* movements. Perhaps of even

[76] Tucker, *Mahdis* 121–127.
[77] Tucker, Charismatic Leadership 29–38.
[78] Tucker, *Mahdis* 120–125.

greater importance, the Kūfan sectarians were the first soldiers of the millenarian sectarian social formation in the Islamic world. In this respect, these seemingly minor and easily ignored sects played a role out of all proportion to their numbers or their immediate success.

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INTERCESSORY CLAIMS OF ṢŪFĪ COMMUNITIES DURING THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES: 'MESSIANIC' LEGITIMIZING STRATEGIES ON THE SPECTRUM OF NORMATIVITY

Devin DeWeese

The apparent proliferation of quasi-messianic movements in the Muslim world beginning in the 14th and 15th centuries has been attributed to a variety of factors, including the political, social, religious, and economic dislocations accompanying the Mongol conquest and its aftermath, the age-old appeal of hopes for social justice and retribution against oppressors, the supposed taste for 'non-normative' programs of doctrine, ritual, and leadership among 'lightly Islamized' Turkic nomads newly powerful in particular regions (or among an Iranian population deemed receptive to such non-normative programs because of historical experience or cultural inclination), and an upwelling and 'actualization' of longstanding and barely submerged messianic tendencies rooted in pre-Islamic religions. Aspects of several of these factors may indeed have some value for our understanding of the developments of this era, but the specific connections between many such messianic movements and the social and religious milieu of Ṣūfism, broadly speaking, are of obvious importance; yet explanations for the increase in messianic movements during this period that have taken note of the Ṣūfī environment in which they often emerged have tended to stress the contribution of doctrinal developments linked to Ṣūfī esoteric thought, or of ritual patterns reflective of Ṣūfī practices, each typically interpreted on the basis of the supposition that Ṣūfism was inherently syncretic and was 'permeable' to influences extrinsic to 'normative' Islam.

I would argue that another factor characteristic of Ṣūfī communities in the eastern Islamic world during this era should be recognized as a contributor to the emergence of social and religious movements that proposed a unique individual status for their leaders, and a unique communal status for their affiliates. What I have in mind is the intense competition among Ṣūfī communities of this period, fostered by widening circles of public participation and involvement, and by emerging patterns of patronage; the claims often yielded by such competition developed in the context of still-diverse modes of asserting not only the legitimacy or authority,

but the superiority, of their respective communal programs that prevailed before the widespread (if never quite complete) recognition of the *silsila*, or chain of initiatic transmission traced back to the Prophet, as the key guarantor of legitimacy for Ṣūfī traditions.

I have outlined elsewhere[1] some of these modes of asserting legitimacy and superiority, which include hereditary ties with a famous shaykh of the past, the possession of certain insignia of authority, a visionary encounter affirming direct sanction by God or the Prophet, spiritual initiation by Khiḍr, the speed or efficacy of a particular disciplinary method,[2] a distinctive social stance or juridical profile, and, finally, the mode that became normative by the 16th century, the *silsila*. The present study is focused on just one among the diverse modes of legitimation proposed, implicitly and explicitly, by Ṣūfī communities of the eastern Islamic world during the 14th and 15th centuries: claims of special intercessory power accessible to devotees of a particular saint and, by extension, to members of the Ṣūfī community linked with him, as well as claims of direct sanction by the Prophet, who thereby in effect extends his own intercessory power to the sanctioned saint.[3] We often find, that is, particular Ṣūfī groups asserting that to join a particular saint's community, or merely to invoke his name, would lead one automatically to salvation or realization, because of some special favor granted to the saint by God or the Prophet; explicit claims of intercessory ability are common, and implicit claims of the same—through emphasis upon direct approval, sanction, and blessing by the Prophet himself, the definitive intercessor for the Muslim community—are even more widespread.

Such assertions stop short of the universal reach of outright messianic claims (as in the case, for example, of the Nūrbakhshiyya), though in principle they elevate the 'founding' saint to the level of the Prophet himself, and do so in a way that is significantly more grandiose than is evidenced in the familiar equation of the saint in his community with the Prophet in his *umma*; these assertions likewise fall short of the grand political claims made within some groups of this era, including the erstwhile hereditary Ṣūfī community of the Ṣafawiyya. But they clearly belong on a spectrum of assertions of the special status of the 'founder' or eponym of a particular Ṣūfī community, and as such they help illuminate the diverse range of

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[1] See DeWeese, The Legitimation of Bahā' ad-Dīn Naqshband 262–263.

[2] DeWeese, Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity 251–300.

[3] On the restriction of intercession to the Prophet (and its 'relaxations'), see Wensinck, Gimaret, and Schimmel, Shafāʿa, *EI*[2] ix, 177–179.

claims entertained by Ṣūfī communities and their broader constituencies in the eastern Islamic world in the aftermath of the Mongol conquest.

One noteworthy implication of this claim of special intercessory power is a focus upon a broader body of adherents or affiliates of the founding saint's community, rather than on a narrow group of the elect disciples or others intent upon the full range of ascending mystical experiences; the appeal of the founding saint's intercession, that is, is typically addressed to those seeking the basics of salvation (though occasionally we find a general promise of exalted mystical attainments through affiliation with a particular shaykh or community). The point is that such claims lend themselves to the context of social movements considerably broader than the typical model of the Ṣūfī circle in earlier times.

Another implication of such intercessory claims, I would suggest, is the need for caution in positing a kind of orderly, natural development in the Ṣūfī understanding of the status of the master vis-à-vis his disciples. Much has been made, that is, of shifts in the conceptualization of the master-disciple relationship in Ṣūfism, with, for example, discussions of the shift from the 'teaching shaykh' to the 'directing shaykh';[4] many such discussions have failed to consider the impact of the expanded roles assigned to Ṣūfī masters, rhetorically, in the range of legitimizing strategies outlined above, including claims of intercessory power. At the same time, some of these 'normative' discussions of the shaykh's multiple roles in fact help set in relief how truly extravagant and grandiose many of the claims made for some shaykhs in this era actually were; in these cases the shaykh is being ascribed roles that differ not just in degree, but in kind, from the roles assigned to the shaykh in earlier periods (and in more 'normative' environments). They thus fall a good way, along the 'spectrum of normativity,' in the direction of the fully messianic claims that came to be cemented for a handful of Ṣūfī leaders. That these claims were recognized to be extreme even within the communities that produced them is suggested by their virtual disappearance in the later literary productions of those communities; that is, we find such claims in works written within particular Ṣūfī communities during the 14th and 15th centuries, but by

[4] The classic argument was developed in Meier, Ḫurāsān und das Ende der klassischen Sūfik 545–570. See also the discussion in Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet* 29 ff., 168 ff., in the latter case arguing a further shift from the "directing shaykh" to the "mediating shaykh," a shift that was completed during the early 20th century according to the groups and materials explored there, but in any case regarded as a discrete and unidirectional process.

the 16th and 17th centuries, as the same Ṣūfī communities became more 'domesticated' and more attuned to the strictures of 'normativity,' their literature downplays such claims or ignores them altogether.[5]

Intercessory Claims in 'Yasawī' Circles: The Ismāʿīl Atāʾī Community

Several quite vivid examples of claims of intercessory power appear in a little-known Turkic work from the 14th century, written by the son, named Isḥāq Khwāja, of an important Central Asian shaykh known as Ismāʿīl Ata;[6] this figure, who was based in the locality of Qażghirt, midway between Tashkent and Sayrām (in what is now southern Kazakhstan), died in the early 14th century, and the Ṣūfī community linked with him belonged to the Ṣūfī tradition of 'Turkistān' that would become known as the Yasawiyya. Evidence from the 14th century to the 16th suggests that the Ismāʿīl Atāʾī tradition was dominated by hereditary succession, and that its representatives legitimized their authority chiefly on the basis of descent from the 'founding' saint (the work of Isḥāq Khwāja, for instance, includes an explicit defense of hereditary *shaykh*-hood); there are also signs of appeals to other legitimizing strategies, however, and Isḥāq Khwāja's work (which survives in two redactions) includes at least three evocations of other Yasawī saints' intercessory claims, as well as an extended narrative legitimizing his father's authority on the basis of his special status as the *quṭb* and as an intercessor for his devotees.

First, the work of Isḥāq Khwāja preserves two lines of Turkic verse ascribed explicitly to "Ḥakīm Sulaymān;" this is in fact our earliest known reference to the figure known more widely as "Ḥakīm Ata,"[7] whom the passage shows declaring, "If [God] is merciful and Qul Sulaymān reaches the gate of paradise, / I shall not go in without taking along those friends

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[5] Similar developments occur in connection with other legitimizing strategies of this era, as in the case of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, for whom several legitimizing narratives were recorded at the very beginning of the 15th century, and then dropped from the hagiographical repertoire in later times; see my discussion in DeWeese, Legitimation 265–268.

[6] I have discussed this work most recently in DeWeese, Orality 293–307.

[7] On this figure, see DeWeese, Ḥakīm Ata, 573–574, and DeWeese, Three Tales 121–135. Ḥakīm Ata is associated with the Khwārazmian locality of Bāqïrghān, and is also linked with verse under the name "Qul Sulaymān," the appellation found in the verse cited here, and the one typically found in the collection of poetry ascribed to him known as the "*Bāqïrghān kitābï*;" the lines cited by Isḥāq Khwāja, however, do not appear in available versions of that work, all of which are quite late.

who held the hem [of my robe]."[8] The phrasing of this brief passage, in addition to evoking the ethos of a veritable *bodhisattva*, also echoes a familiar element from some *ḥadīth*s often cited in connection with the Prophet's intercessory power, referring to those "who hold my skirt" seeking and gaining his intercession; in Ṣūfī contexts, the same phrase, "holding the skirt" or clutching at the hem of the shaykh's garment, is also used to allude to the establishment of formal discipleship, similar to other initiatic rites (such as the cutting of the hair, noted below). The verse thus clearly reflects the notion of intercessory shaykh-hood, in which salvation or other attainment is promised to those who establish the bond of discipleship with the shaykh.

Another claim of intercessory power is made, in the work of Isḥāq Khwāja, for the shaykh known as Süksük Ata, the master of Ismāʿīl Ata's father, Ibrāhīm Ata. This account in fact shows Süksük Ata, in effect, as the agent of the Prophet's intercession, but in a way that looks after his followers *and* descendants. The story[9] explains that Süksük Ata once needed the services of a fuller (*qaṣṣār*), and brought a fine white tunic (*karbās*) for bleaching; the fuller asked, "What is your name? Let me make note of it here so as not to treat the wrong cloth" (*bu yerde bitib nishāna qïlayïn karbās ghalaṭ bolmasun*). Süksük Ata replied that his name was Firʿawn (Pharaoh), to which the fuller replied scornfully, "Couldn't you get another name? Get rid of that name!" (*özgä āt tābmādïng-mu? bu āt-nï qoyub-sen*). Süksük Ata then explained, "Fuller, my name is Muḥammad, but I do not consider it proper to write the blessed name of Muḥammad, the Prophet of God, so that you can beat it with a bleacher's mallet and abuse it" (*ay qaṣṣār, atïm muḥammad turur, ammā ravā tutmas-men kim muḥammad rasūlu'llāh atïn bitip va angāh kūdūng-i gāzurī birlä dögsäng va ihānat qïlsang*). Then Süksük Ata "went back to his home, and that night, when he lay his head on his pillow," he saw the Prophet in a dream, promising that "because you honored my name," "we have interceded for your descendants (*farzandlar*) and your faithful companions (*muʿtaqid bolghan yārānlar*), and they will be saved from hell . . ." Here the pledge of intercession and guaranteed salvation is offered simply by virtue of descent from the shaykh, but also through discipleship.

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[8] *Yarlïqansa qul sulaymān tegsä uchmāḥ qabghïnā / dūst-lar kim tuttï étek almayïn kirmes-men-ā* (Isḥāq, *Ḥadīqat*, MS Kabul, f. 234b).

[9] Isḥāq, *Ḥadīqat*, MS Kabul, f. 222a.

A third interesting claim is made in connection with Ismāʿīl Ata's father and master, Ibrāhīm Ata, with regard to another ritual indication of discipleship:[10]

> Someone asked Ibrāhīm Ata, "If the scissors of the shaykh have been used on a person's forehead (*birägü-ning allïgha miqrāż-i mashā'ikh tégmish bolsa*), and he has set foot on the path of poverty, but commits a sin afterwards and departs this world without mending his repentance (*tadāruk-i tawba qïlmasa*), will God save him from humiliation?"

Ibrāhīm Ata said, "If a shaykh has used the scissors on a disciple's forehead (*mashā'ikh murīd allïgha miqrāż sürsä*) and has interceded for him (*anï shafāʿat qïlsa*), God most high will also be merciful to him"—but only if the shaykh to whom he becomes a disciple is thoroughly versed in the *ʿilm-i sharīʿat va ṭarīqat*. The point clearly made here is that whoever becomes a disciple of such a shaykh enjoys, by virtue of that status, the shaykh's intercession, and that intercession is declared to be an essential guarantor of God's mercy (here even the Prophet disappears as an intermediary).

Finally, the most remarkable examples of intercessory claims appear in connection with the central legitimatizing experience for Ismāʿīl Ata himself; that experience is recounted in two ways in the two redactions of his son's work. I have discussed these accounts elsewhere,[11] and a brief summary highlighting the issue of intercession may suffice here.

In the first, and possibly older, account, Ismāʿīl Ata is visited, in a vision, by the spirits of all the prophets and saints, led by Ibrāhīm and Mūsā; these prophets declare that God had made Ismāʿīl Ata the *quṭb*, and had promised automatic salvation, on the Day of Judgment, for anyone who trusted in Ismāʿīl Ata (the vision also yielded a written document affirming all this, intended for Ismāʿīl Ata's disciples). The two prophets also affirmed that in making him the *quṭb*, God had given Ismāʿīl Ata "the key to mercy" (*raḥmat kalīdin sengä berdi*). That the latter phrase alludes to his status as an intercessor is confirmed by the following passage, an excursus on a saying, ascribed to the Prophet, regarding the three groups who enjoy intercessory power like that of the prophets (*üch gurūh turur kim ularnïng shafāʿati payghambar-lar shafāʿati méngizlik turur*): first, pious scholars (*muttaqī ʿālim-lar*); second, "those who serve the scholars with sincerity and for the sake of God" (*ʿālim-largha ṣidqï birle ḥaqq riżā-sï*

[10] Isḥāq, *Ḥadīqat*, MS Kabul, f. 231b.
[11] See DeWeese, Orality 305–306; Isḥāq, *Ḥadīqat*, MS Kabul, f. 252a.

uchun khidmat qïlghan-lar); and third, "patient dervishes, of whom there are many in 'exile' " (*ṣābir darvīsh-lar kim ghurbat ichindä telim bolsa-lar*). The net effect of the passage is to affirm Ismāʿīl Ata's equivalence to the prophets in terms of his intercessory power.

The other version of the legitimizing narrative may reflect a separate tradition circulated to assert the special sacred link that Ismāʿīl Ata could convey to his disciples. According to the account,[12] Ismāʿīl Ata saw the spirit of his recently deceased father, Ibrāhīm Ata, who declared to his son that he was to be made "the shaykh of the last times" and given "the rank of the seal of the saints," both phrases affirming an exalted universal 'historical' role for Ismāʿīl Ata (and echoing the eschatological tone of fully messianic claims). At first, Ismāʿīl Ata declined this responsibility, using words that reinforce the eschatological tone of the narrative, but also echo the theme of Ḥakīm Ata's verse: "These new disciples of ours are the community of the last times, and will be rebellious and sinful; I would be ashamed if they are led to hell while I sit with the shaykhs." His son's protest induced Ibrāhīm Ata's spirit to convey a specific request, in effect, up the 'chain of command,' following first his Ṣūfī *silsila*, back to Aḥmad Yasawī, who then appealed to ʿAlī, he to Muḥammad, and he to God; God's message, conveyed down the same chain of transmission, was as follows: "Tell Ismāʿīl Ata that whoever, with pure sincerity, becomes your disciple, and is devoted to you with true love, and invokes [the name] 'Ismāʿīl Ata,' then by your witness, I will lead that person into paradise with no questions asked."[13] The force of this promise is perhaps underscored by the rest of the narrative, in which Ismāʿīl Ata insists that it be put in writing (yielding a written document referred to in the same way as the document mentioned in the first version of the legitimizing narrative), but the key 'gift' bestowed on the saint, essentially the same in both accounts, is quite remarkable: a promise of direct and unquestioned admission to paradise for devotees of Ismāʿīl Ata.

Curiously, an explicit claim of direct sanction by the Prophet, and indeed an implication of Ismāʿīl Ata's 'equivalence' to the Prophet, in terms of intercession and other matters, are found in an incidental reference to Ismāʿīl Ata in a Kubrawī hagiography from the 16th century.

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[12] Isḥāq, *Ḥadīqat*, untitled redaction, MS 252, ff. 79a–b; MS 3004, ff. 181a–182a.

[13] *Har kim bir yolï arïgh iʿtiqād birlä séngä murīd bolup maḥabbat-i ḫaqīqī birlä muʿtaqid bolsalar, va ismāʿīl atā tésälär, anï sizlär-ning guvāh-lïqïngïz birlä soruq-suz bihisht-kä kéltürgäy-mén* (MS 252, f. 79b).

This work explains[14] that "Ismāʿīl Atā the unlettered" was a "natural-born saint" (*valī-yi mādar-zād*) and manifested many wonders during his childhood; he had an ʿAlavī genealogy and was from the *vilāyat* of Qażghirt. The account then quotes the Prophet as having said, "God will send out a man from al-ʿAjam; his name will be Ismāʿīl Ata, his *kunya* will be my *kunya* [i.e., Abū-l-Qāsim], and he will be the Lamp of the Community (*sirāj al-umma*). Who honors him has honored me, and who hates him has hated me." The account concludes noting that this Ismāʿīl Ata had a "connection" (*qarābat*, perhaps indicating natural kinship) with the Sulṭān of Shaykhs, Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī. The particulars of this account, including the link to Yasawī, the mention of Qażghirt, and the description of him as a "natural-born saint," echo well-known features of Ismāʿīl Ata's biography; others, such as the *kunya* and *laqab* implied for him, are otherwise unknown. The Prophetic prediction recounted here in this 'external' source, in any case, must have been adopted from some oral account, or written source, produced within Ismāʿīl Atā'ī circles, suggesting that these circles were still claiming intercessory power for Ismāʿīl Ata, confirmed by direct Prophetic sanction, in the 16th century.

Intercessory Claims in 'Kubrawī' Circles: Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī

Lest we suppose that such intercessory claims are somehow peculiar to the Turkic environment and reflect aberrations distinctive to 'Turkic' Islam and its imagined 'heterodox' propensities, it may be helpful to consider another example more firmly associated with the Iranian world. It is by now well-known that a prominent messianic movement of the eastern Islamic world, the Nūrbakhshiyya, emerged in the 15th century as an outgrowth of a Ṣūfī commity that was by that time beginning to define itself in terms of an initiatic lineage traced to (or through) Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221);[15] less attention has been given, however, to the articulation of claims of direct sanction by the Prophet, of special intercessory abilities, and of a consequent communal 'advantage' for those attached to the lineage, in terms of salvation and mystical attainment, within the *other*

[14] *Riyāḍ al-awliyā*, MS Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Curzon No. 704, f. 50b/94b. On the work, see DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī 134, and DeWeese, Eclipse of the Kubravīyah 63–64.

[15] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*.

branch of what we may by this time call the Kubrawiyya (because the sources are by then using this term).

The eponym of the Nūrbakhshiyya, Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464), was a disciple of Isḥāq Khuttalānī (d. 827/1424), who was in turn among the disciples of the famous Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385); the followers of Khuttalānī who rejected the messianic claims of Nūrbakhsh were led by Sayyid ʿAbd Allāh Barzishābādī (d. 872/1468), who stands at the head of a Kubrawī initiatic lineage that remained strong in Central Asia and parts of Iran and India well into the 17th century.[16] One of Barzishābādī's disciples, a certain Ḥaydar Badakhshī, compiled a hagiographical work focused on the life of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, entitled *Manqabat al-jawāhir*, evidently early in the second half of the 15th century, and probably in Mawarannahr or Khurāsān;[17] I have argued elsewhere that this work, when compared with the earlier hagiography focused on Hamadānī (the *Khulāṣat al-manāqib* of Sayyid Jaʿfar Badakhshī, completed within a few years of Hamadānī's death), reflects a pronounced shift toward a heightened sense of corporate identification and solidarity that may be referred to as '*ṭarīqa*-consciousness.'[18]

The work also ignores the Nūrbakhshiyya, and Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh's status as a disciple of Khuttalānī, altogether, at least in explicit terms; but the *Manqabat al-jawāhir* does include, as part of its author's emphasis on the merits of his Kubrawī community, a host of claims about the special status of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, and (to a lesser extent) of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, that must be regarded as both extravagant and remarkable when compared with earlier literature produced in 'Kubrawī' lineages (and we may note that just as the grandiose claims about Ismāʿīl Ata disappear from Yasawī sources of the 16th and 17th centuries, these claims about Hamadānī are left behind as well, making no appearance in the literature of Ḥaydar Badakhshī's lineage from later times). It is possible that these claims and depictions—which, it must be acknowledged, fall

[16] See my preliminary study of this lineage in DeWeese, Eclipse of the Kubravīyah 45–83.

[17] The date is suggested by the death-date known for Ḥaydar Badakhshī's master Barzishābādī. The latter was based in Khurāsān, but Ḥaydar Badakhshī may well have been active in Mawarannahr. Of interest in this regard is his adaptation of a narrative found also in the earlier *Khulāṣat al-manāqib*, about Hamadānī's blessing, as a child, by a large group of learned and pious men assembled by "the ruler of my city;" in Ḥaydar Badakhshī's rendering, there is no reference to Hamadān, and the ruler is said to have assembled the people of ʿIrāq as well as "the people of Samarqand and the people of the whole of Mawarannahr" (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 361a.

[18] See DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī 121–158.

short of the still grander claims asserted for Nūrbakhsh—simply reflect the general 'experimental' atmosphere of this period; but it is likewise possible, and on balance more likely, that they reflect the specific circumstances of competition between the Kubrawī community to which Ḥaydar Badakhshī belonged and the emerging, though unmentioned, Nūrbakhshī community.

The *Manqabat al-jawāhir* consistently ascribes to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī an exalted status that goes well beyond the claims typically made for saints of this era. A few passages directly affirm his expected role as an intercessor on the Day of Judgment. A poem praising Hamadānī, by Ḥaydar Badakhshī himself, affirms that for intercession with God, Hamadānī is "higher" (*bar-tar*) than all the *awliyā*, and "better" (*bih-tar*) than the *aṣfiyā*.[19] Another poem, attributed to an unnamed ruler in Kashmir who is said to have been converted to Islam by Hamadānī, both asks for the saint's intercession on the Day of Judgment and declares that the saint will invariably help him then: "you will help me when the Resurrection comes" (*chūn dar qiyāmatam tū āmdād mīkunī*), "I want you to intercede for me on the Last Day" (*khwāham ki rūz-i ḥashar shafāʿat-i marā kunī*), "O Amīr, at the End let me have a share of your intercession" (*ākhir marā naṣīb-i shafāʿat-i tū bādā yā amīr*).[20]

Also indicative of an unusually exalted status is the power imputed to Hamadānī, in several narratives from the *Manqabat al-jawāhir*, to raise the dead; this remarkable ability goes well beyond the 'typical' *karāmāt* ascribed to most saints, who may be shown identifying the dead in their graves, or even resurrecting dead animals, but are only rarely said to raise dead people to life. In one story, Hamadānī brings 70 people back to life and thereby converts an entire village of Christians to Islam;[21] another account tells of a disciple of Hamadānī whom he restored to life in the midst of his burial.[22] Two other narratives portray those seeking to test Hamadānī citing his reputation for raising the dead as they demand a miracle of this sort from him.[23] The ability to raise the dead is typically attributed to the *masīḥ*, and it is no doubt significant that it is alluded to

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[19] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 439a, in narrative No. 49.

[20] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 435b–436a, in narrative No. 48; noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 153.

[21] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 364a–365b (No. 13), noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 150–151.

[22] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 434a–435a (No. 47), noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 156.

[23] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 380b, in No. 23; f. 391a, in No. 26.

so often in the *Manqabat al-jawāhir*; at the same time, this ability is never directly linked with a claim of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī's messianic status, and in fact the work seems to waver between a straightforward affirmation, with examples, that he performed such a miracle, and the position, more common in Ṣūfī literature, that such *karāmāt* were diversions from the goal of the spiritual life, and were more likely to be the concern of those who doubted the *awliyā* than of the real *awliyā* themselves.

By far the most common means of affirming Hamadānī's special status is by recounting visions in which the Prophet himself affirms his descendant's importance and extraordinary power. Altogether, the *Manqabat al-jawāhir* contains 51 distinct narratives of varying length, and a vision of the Prophet figures in 19 of these:[24] in one, it involves the Prophet's appearance, and promise, to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (discussed below), and in the other 18 the Prophet appears either to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī himself, or to an associate of Hamadānī, in both contexts confirming Hamadānī's exalted status.

The visions of the Prophet, in addition to their frequency, are often of decisive importance, occurring at pivotal moments in Hamadānī's career and prompting important, and well-known, events central to his hagiographical image. It is the Prophet, for example, who appears in a dream and commands Hamadānī to go to Kashmir and convert its people to Islam;[25] in another narrative, the Prophet appears to show Hamadānī the place where his grave should be, in Kulāb, thereby establishing the site of his future shrine.[26] Yet another narrative affirms that the Prophet appeared to Hamadānī at the shrine of Junayd, in Baghdād, and directed him to go to the city of Ardabīl, to receive the *bayʿat* from the ruler there, and to make the ruler his disciple;[27] the account describes the ruler's joy at meeting a saint who could confirm to him that he was indeed among the people of paradise, not the people of hell (an assurance that may evoke the claims of intercessory power for Hamadānī, discussed shortly),

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[24] By contrast, four narratives involve encounters with Khiḍr (with or without Ilyās); and in one narrative (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat* ff. 371b–372b, No. 20; noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 144), Imām ʿAlī Riżā comes forth from his tomb, as Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī is visiting it, recites a blessing for him, receives the *bayʿat* from him, and instructs him in the *dhikr*.

[25] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 419b (No. 42); noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 152.

[26] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 417b–419a (No. 41), noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 149.

[27] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 382b–385b (No. 24); noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 154, note 1.

but also notes that this ruler was murdered not long after Hamadānī's departure. This narrative in all likelihood was of special importance in the time of the author, and no doubt reflects competitive rivalries between Ḥaydar Badakhshī's lineage and other groups, i.e., the Safavids, but its precise referents are unfortunately unclear.

The narratives involving visions of the Prophet naturally include some that simply reinforce elements of Ṣūfī teaching and practice. In one, for instance, the Prophet exhorts Hamadānī to torment his carnal soul (*nafs*) as an essential part of his mystical discipline;[28] in another, however, Hamadānī's earnest engagement in austerities in response to a similar exhortation leads first to a second vision in which the Prophet declares him to have gained acceptance at the court of God, and then to an offer of a special gift:

> A voice said to me, 'Sayyid, ask for something.' I said, 'Prophethood is complete, and I was given the station of Sainthood some time ago; what would I now ask for from the Divine Court?' Again the voice said, 'Ask for something.' I thought to myself that my exalted ancestor [the Prophet] had been given the station of intercession; there is no higher station, so what would I ask for? But again the command came, "Ask." In response I said, 'Let everyone who attaches himself to me be with me in paradise; if he is among the people of faith, he will of course be with me, but if he is among those subject to intercession, let him still be with me.' The command was given, and I accepted.[29]

This passage immediately recalls the promise to Ismāʿīl Ata noted above, and directly affirms Hamadānī's role as an intercessor for those attached to his community; and as in the case of Ismāʿīl Ata, Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, too, is ascribed both communally-significant intercessory claims and the status of *quṭb*.[30]

That the promise of intercessory power is here connected with Hamadānī's prowess in the performance of austerities hints at another

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[28] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 370b–371a, No. 19.

[29] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 414b (in No. 38): *hātifī āwāz dād ki, yā sayyid, chīzī ba-khwāh; dar jawāb guftam, nubuwwat tamām shud wa maqām-i walāyat muddatī shud ki mārā dādand; ḥālā az dargāh chi khwāham. wa gufta-and bāz chīzī ba-khwāh. chūn dar khūd fikr kardam ki maqām-i shafāʿat ba-jadd-i buzurgwār-i mārā dādand, ḥālā balandtar maqām chīzī nīst, chi khwāham. bāz ḥukm shud ki ba-khwāh. dar jawāb guftam, har ki muʿtaqid-i man bāshad, bā man dar bihisht shawad; agar ahl-i īmān bāshad, yaqīn ast ki bā man khwāhad būd, va agar ahl-i shafāʿat bāshad, bāz bā man bāshad. ḥukm shud, qabūl kardīm.*

[30] See, for instance, the poetic mention of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī receiving cloak of sainthood and the *kulāh* of *quṭbiyyat* (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 423a, in No. 42).

mode of asserting the special benefits of communal attachment to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, through stories of visions in which the Prophet sanctifies aspects of the communal practice of Hamadānī's Ṣūfī community, beginning with the day-to-day devotional activities of his followers in the Kubrawī order. In the latter regard, one narrative describes the Prophet's appearance to Hamadānī in a dream to bless the famous *Awrād-i fatḥiyya*, the "litanies" assembled by Hamadānī for recitation by his followers.[31] In another narrative, Hamadānī is directed by the Prophet, in a vision, to adopt the Shāfiʿī juridical school, though the vision also is taken by Hamadānī as allowing him to instruct some disciples in the Ḥanafī *madhhab*;[32] this concession has the additional effect of subordinating *madhhab*, and its behavioral implications, to affiliation with Hamadānī's Ṣūfī community, but all these accounts of the Prophet endorsing elements of communal ritual and devotional practice (along with the Prophet's directive to establish Hamadānī's shrine, noted above, which also involves the devotional legacy of his followers) work to cement the connection between Hamadānī's special status, on the one hand, and those who bind themselves to Hamadānī's community and lineage, on the other. That Prophetic sanction of communal Ṣūfī practices is otherwise typically asserted, or assumed, on the basis of transmission through a normative *silsila* only underscores the distinctive way in which that sanction is shown here.

The connection between Hamadānī's special status and those affiliated with him is affirmed still more directly in several narratives involving visionary appearances of the Prophet to the figures most directly linked to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī in the Kubrawī lineage, i.e., those who trained him and those whom he trained; both groups are of importance in terms of sanctioning the Kubrawī initiatory lineage for later affiliates, but ironically their role in these accounts is to serve as witnesses to the Prophet's direct sanction for Hamadānī, in effect by-passing the lineage. With regard to accounts of Hamadānī's training, the *Manqabat al-jawāhir* opens with a series of five anecdotes[33] explaining how Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī came to be received and trained by several of the many figures typically identified as his masters. All but one of these anecdotes hinges on the appearance

[31] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 358a–360a (No. 6), discussed briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 144.

[32] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 376a–377b, No. 22; see DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 143–144.

[33] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 348b–357a; several of these were noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 146–147.

of the Prophet, in a dream, with pivotal importance for the subsequent career of Hamadānī, and for his legitimation as a Ṣūfī shaykh. In the first two cases, Hamadānī's vision of the Prophet either leads to, or confirms, his discipleship under the two shaykhs through whom his 'Kubrawī' *silsila* is most often traced (Maḥmūd Mazdaqānī and Muḥammad Adhkānī, both direct disciples of the famous 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī [d. 736/1336]). The third narrative comes closer to stressing the special status of Hamadānī within that *silsila*: the Prophet appears to Simnānī in a dream and in effect sanctions Hamadānī's adoption into his initiatory lineage, by predicting his descendant's appearance during the time of Simnānī's successors, and by directly ordering those successors to transmit to Hamadānī the *dhikr* and the *khirqa* belonging to this lineage.[34]

In the fifth among these narratives, meanwhile, the Prophet makes no appearance. Rather, each of several shaykhs also linked (though less firmly) with Simnānī is said to have seen the spirit of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī before his birth, and their anxious inquiries about when he would be born culminate in a dream in which one among them sees Khiḍr and Ilyās carrying a cloak (*jāma*) belonging, as he is told, to the Quṭb; they had been commanded to deliver the cloak to the newborn son of Sayyid Shihāb al-Dīn Hamadānī, in Hamadān.[35] The boy's status as the Quṭb, as affirmed in this account, is of course far from the messianic role linked with the status of the Mahdī, but it nevertheless carries universal implications, and, as in the case of Ismā'īl Ata, was easy to link with the type of intercessory claims under consideration here.

It is the fourth of these introductory legitimizing narratives[36] that most explicitly invokes the sanction of the Prophet in affirming Hamadānī's exalted rank and special 'historical' status. The account involves the remarkable figure of Sa'īd (or Abū Sa'īd) Ḥabashī, known from a variety of medieval sources not only as a *mu'ammar*—a 'long-lived' saint whose great age facilitated the projection of a direct contact with the Prophet

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[34] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 353a–b (No. 3); the four disciples of Simnānī who figure in the account are Akhī 'Alī Dūstī, Muḥsin Turkistānī, Muḥammad Dihistānī, and 'Alī Miṣrī (with Dūstī chief among them).

[35] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 356a–357a (No. 5); the shaykhs named are Burhān al-Dīn Sāgharjī, Jibrā'īl Kurdī, "Niẓām al-Dīn Ghūrī Khurāsānī," Abū Bakr Ṭūsī, and Khālid Rīsānī (?), with Ghūrī chief among them.

[36] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 353b–355b (No. 4). See now the discussion of this narrative, in connection with the handshake transmission, in Bashir, *Sufi Bodies* 6–7.

far into the later centuries of the *hijra*[37]—but also as a transmitter of the handshake (*muṣāfaḥa*) of the Prophet; the latter type of transmission was itself directly linked with intercessory claims of a sort, insofar as clasping hands with such a transmitter no more than seven generations removed from the Prophet himself was said to ensure the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgment. Ḥabashī's association with Hamadānī is affirmed in a story from the *Khulāṣat al-manāqib*,[38] but the *Manqabat al-jawāhir* gives a much more extensive account with clear points to make: here it is the Prophet who sanctions Hamadānī directly, and affirms his exalted status, with the *muʿammar* reduced simply to a transmitter of the information.

According to the narrative, Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī himself affirmed that when he was 22 years old, he served Abū Saʿīd Ḥabashī and received licensure (*ijāzat*) from him; he asked Ḥabashī why he was called a *muʿammar*, and Ḥabashī answered that he had been a Companion of the Prophet, and even before this he had seen in the Torah and the Gospel that Muḥammad would come after ʿĪsā. Ḥabashī further affirmed that he had heard from the Prophet about Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī; and for this reason, he said, "they call me a *muʿammar*." The account so far subordinates Ḥabashī's status as a *muʿammar* and Companion of the Prophet to Hamadānī's status as the one foretold by Muḥammad (much as Muḥammad had been foretold by ʿĪsā); it also extends the Prophet's 'prediction' of Hamadānī's appearance and high status from the visionary context presented in the first three narratives into the 'historical' context of the long-lived Companion's direct association with the Prophet. Yet the celebration of Hamadānī's status continues. During the time that he was with the Prophet, Ḥabashī then explained, he and other Companions were sitting with the Prophet one day when several birds flew down from the air and alighted on the ground; the "leader" of these birds greeted the group and said that "this is the spirit of your son." Ḥabashī asked who these birds were and what the words meant, and the Prophet explained, "Among these birds was the spirit of one of my descendants;" then he went further: "If I had not existed, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib would have been in my place; and if ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had not existed, he would have been there."[39]

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[37] On the *muʿammarūn*, see the classic discussion of Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, 159–163.

[38] See Teufel, *Lebensbeschreibung* 77; Nūr al-Dīn Jaʿfar Badakhshī, *Khulāṣat al-manāqib* 62–63; cf. DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 137, n. 3.

[39] *Darīn jānwarān rūḥ-i yakī az awlādān-i man būd; agar man nabūdamī, ʿalī ibn abī ṭālib ba-jāy-i man būdī, va agar ʿalī ibn abī ṭālib nabūdī, ū būdī* (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 354b–355a).

This remarkable assertion of the exalted rank of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī—in which we may find a hint, at least, of his later appellation, "the Second ʿAlī" (*ʿAlī-yi thānī*)—precedes a series of specific predictions by the Prophet, to Ḥabashī, about Hamadānī's birth, and the affirmation that Ḥabashī indeed conveyed to Hamadānī the *talqīn-i dhikr* and *ādāb-i khidhmat* of his illustrious ancestor; Hamadānī is also quoted explaining details about Ḥabashī's age (he was 722 years old in the time of the Prophet, and was 1435 years old when he met Hamadānī). But the key point made here is Hamadānī's virtual equivalence with the Prophet.

As for Prophetic appearances to Hamadānī's disciples, several of these emphasize the special favor and assistance bestowed by the Prophet upon his descendant, and may be understood implicitly to extend that special favor to those who attach themselves to Hamadānī. One story, for instance, explaining how Khwāja Isḥāq Khuttalānī came to be Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī's disciple, recounts Khuttalānī's amazement at seeing the Prophet in Hamadānī's *khānqāh*, and learning that inasmuch as this was the *khānqāh* of one of his descendants, the Prophet came every day in order to help his descendant (*har rūz ba-jihat-i madad-i awlād-i khūd mī-āyand*).[40] Another story relates how a different disciple, Shams ad-Dīn Khuttalānī, once saw a large "army" approach the *khānqāh*, led by several men in royal garb, who asked him which cell the Sayyid was in. He showed them a *ḥujra* on the right, and the five leaders went in; then after awhile Hamadānī came out to perform his prayers, and the visitors were nowhere to be seen. Hamadānī explained that the five men were "my great ancestor" and the *khulafā-yi rāshidīn*, who had come to instruct him in the *dhikr*.[41] A clearer allusion to intercessory power is found in yet another account,[42] which credits the Prophet—here identified explicitly as the intercessor on the Day of Judgment—with leading an unidentified man, said to have been desirous of meeting and serving a dervish master for the rest of his life, to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī. The man, in a dream, sees someone sitting beneath a tree with a crown on his head; he asks others who appear with this "*pādshāh*" what country he is from, and they identify him, saying, "This king is the intercessor on the Day of Resurrection" (*īn pādshāh*

[40] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 368a–369b (No. 16), noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 147.

[41] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 363a–364a (No. 11), noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 144.

[42] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 432a–433b (No. 46), noted briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 148.

shafīʿ-i yawm-i ḥashar-ast). Thus identified, the Prophet tells the man to go to Hamadānī, thus making Hamadānī, in effect, the very substance of his intercession (and giving it prior to the Day of Judgment).

In another, quite remarkable, story, related by Hamadānī's disciple Muḥammad Ṭāliqānī, the Prophet is shown promising direct response, and intercession, to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, without need of a common intermediary. According to the account, Imām Ghazālī, in a vision, told Hamadānī that he had seen the Prophet, who had declared, "the banner of ʿAlī Hamadānī is higher than the banner of all the great saints;" the next day, Hamadānī himself saw the Prophet in a dream, and the Prophet said, "My son, your station is higher than the stations of all the *awliyāʾuʾllāh*, either in the *ʿālam-i ḥaqīqat* or the *ʿālam-i ghayb*." Then Hamadānī came to himself, came out of his *khānqāh*, and promptly saw Khiḍr; he shook his hand (*bā man muṣāfaḥa kard*), but then had a distinctly unsatisfying exchange with him (Hamadānī hoped for some blessing or good word from Khiḍr, who replied, however, that God had already given him everything he wished for, leaving nothing that he should want from Khiḍr). Khiḍr then disappeared, and in the evening, the Prophet appeared again. Hamadānī told him, "My great ancestor, today I asked for something from the holy Khiḍr, and he said in response that what I had wished for, God had given me, and so what is left that I would ask from him." The Prophet said, "My son, what need has any descendant of mine for Khiḍr and Ilyās? Whatever you want, ask me for it!" (*yā waladī, har ki awlād-i khalaf-i man bāshad ūrā chi iḥtiyāj az khiḍr wa ilyās bāshad? har chi mīkhwāhīd az mā ṭalab kunīd*). The account ends with Ṭāliqānī affirming that this story not only increased his devotion (and his confidence that Hamadānī was indeed higher in station than Imām Muḥammad Ghazālī), but also his eagerness to "soothe the heart" of anyone who rejected "this group" (*munkir-i īn farīq*).[43]

The account thus eliminates Khiḍr as a go-between, and may be read, perhaps, as a challenge to Ṣūfī groups linked to shaykhs who could claim only a relationship with Khiḍr (and also, perhaps, to those offering just

[43] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 439a–441b (No. 50); noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 147, note 5. By contrast, however, another story (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 385b–390b, No. 25, discussed briefly in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 154) credits the Prophet with keeping Hamadānī safe from the wrath of a tyrannical ruler before whom he was about to appear (Timur is clearly intended, but is not named), by warning him not to pray for either good or evil to befall the ruler, but leaves it to Khiḍr to explain to the puzzled Hamadānī that this ruler's appetite for blood was not yet sated (i.e., that Hamadānī would have been his next victim without the Prophet's counsel).

the handshake connection); it claims superiority for those bound to Hamadānī, however, not merely on the basis of his descent from the Prophet, but on the basis of Hamadānī's special status as sanctioned by the Prophet (herein may be found an echo, at least, of the rival appeal of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, who also claimed both descent from the Prophet and a unique historical role).

The element at the end of this story—the narrator's wish to soothe the heart of rejecters of his group—brings us, finally, to a central claim of the *Manqabat al-jawāhir*, one that explains, in effect, the distinctive merits of the Kubrawī order, and links them with the special status of Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī (which has otherwise been argued chiefly in terms of Prophetic sanction for the Prophet's descendant, but has entailed also Prophetic sanction of the Kubrawī lineage itself, or at least the portions of it immediately linked to Hamadānī). As I have noted elsewhere, the *Manqabat* includes several specific affirmations of the superiority of the Kubrawī lineage represented by Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, with a clear understanding of that lineage as a distinct, privileged, and even elect, group; these affirmations include the claim that various mystical attainments were guaranteed simply by affiliation with the community referred to in the work both as the Kubrawiyya and as the Hamadāniyya.

The author cites verse by his master affirming that the "*silsila-yi Hamadānī*" is the "wisest" of all *silsila*s and as the fastest path to God, as well as his master's straightforward statement that the Kubrawiyya is "the best among the *ṭarīqa*s" and leads most expeditiously to the goal of the spiritual life;[44] he offers another brief poem affirming that divine 'witnessing' and mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat*) are inevitably achieved by "everyone who has become attached (*muʿtaqid*) to the *silsila-yi Hamadānī*;"[45] he includes an extended discussion of the special advantage of the Kubrawiyya in 'perfecting' sainthood (*walāyat*) and mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat*);[46] he cites Hamadānī himself affirming that "our path" is "more powerful" than other paths and warning that if someone affiliates with another path, "he will not reach the goal;"[47] and he presents a remarkable narrative affirming that the vision of God is a gift distinctive to the Kubrawī

[44] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 362a (No. 8), discussed in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 141.
[45] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, f. 382b (No. 23).
[46] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 441b–442b (No. 51, the last section of the work), discussed in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 141–142.
[47] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 437a–439a (No. 49), discussed in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 142.

lineage, obtained by the 'founder,' Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, and passed down within his *silsila*. The account includes the specific request by Kubrā that the exalted mystical state he achieved might be vouchsafed to "everyone who becomes a follower of this *ṭarīq*;" the request was indeed granted, and Kubrā then declared that initiation into his lineage would in itself guarantee the experience he had achieved: "I have bestowed the same mystical state upon whomever I have given the *bayʿat*," he stated, and every follower of this order would gain the same state, "until the very end of the *ṭarīqat*."[48]

These passages all highlight the special benefits of mere affiliation with the Kubrawī *ṭarīqa*, reflecting a growing emphasis upon communal solidarity, to be sure, but going further and promising that the supreme mystical attainments are guaranteed for those who enter the *ṭarīqa*, simply by virtue of their initiation and affiliation. The latter account, in particular, shows the 'founder' of the community, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, as an intercessor, in effect, demonstrating his concern for later affiliates of his lineage by securing 'automatic' spiritual attainment as his, and their, special gift. These claims must be understood in the context of competition among Ṣūfī communities, but at the same time they operate within the logic of claims made by fully messianic figures, i.e., that religious goals (salvation, mystical realization) are ensured simply by being part of a community linked to a figure whose special religious status allows him to promise extraordinary gifts to those who attach themselves to him.

Conclusion

The accounts reviewed here suggest the currency, within Ṣūfī circles that came to be understood as belonging to the Yasawī and Kubrawī traditions, of extraordinary claims about the intercessory power of prominent shaykhs in those traditions, typically linked with some notion of those shaykhs' special role at a particular historical junction, and inevitably tied to some kind of direct sanction and blessing of these shaykhs by the Prophet Muḥammad, through which anyone who became a follower and devotee of these shaykhs was guaranteed some special (and, typically salvific) favor. That such claims were not limited to these circles is evident from the range of legitimizing stories circulated about Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband,

[48] Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat,* ff. 397a–403a (No. 31), discussed in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 145–146.

for instance, which include, in addition to accounts comparing him favorably with a host of saints from earlier times and affirming his preeminence as the greatest saint to appear in recent centuries, the affirmation, in the account of the key legitimizing vision he experienced, that previous saints in his lineage bestowed upon him the power to remove afflictions;[49] an immediate example of his intercessory power is provided in a narrative identifying Bahā' al-Dīn as the miraculous rescuer of a sinking ship when a disciple sailing on it invoked his name.[50] The hagiographical repertoire focused on Sayyid Amīr Kulāl, Bahā' al-Dīn's master, includes a story portraying him as an intercessor on the Day of Judgment (though one whose intercession is not explicitly limited to disciples).[51]

Naqshbandī literature also preserves accounts that may be regarded as providing a sort of doctrinal justification for such an intercessory relationship, as in the assertion, attributed to Khwāja ʿAlī ʿAzīzān Rāmītanī, that affiliation with a master belonging to his particular community (*ṭā'ifa*)—i.e., the group known in his time as the Khwājagān—automatically guaranteed quick advancement on the path. In this case, after noting that the traveler on the Ṣūfī path ought to endure austerities in order to achieve the stations and ranks of the path, Rāmītanī acknowledged another, easier way:

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[49] See my discussion in DeWeese, Legitimation 264–268, 279, and the accounts in Ṣalāḥ b. Mubārak Bukhārī, *Anīs al-ṭālibīn* 82, 89. This element in the narrative provides the basis for the popular reputation of Bahā' al-Dīn's shrine in Bukhārā as that of the "trouble-relieving master" (*khwāja-yi balā-gardān*).

[50] Ṣalāḥ b. Mubārak Bukhārī, *Anīs al-ṭālibīn* 168–170. The motif of appealing to a shaykh by calling out his name for deliverance is in fact quite common, with the shaykh becoming, in effect, a protective 'patron' spirit to be called upon by followers in times of distress; in Yasawī lore, a son of Ḥakīm Ata saves the passengers on a sinking ship in Khwārazm, and Aḥmad Yasawī himself rescues a group of merchants whose boat capsizes in the Amu Daryā. Similar power is ascribed to Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī in Ḥaydar Badakhshī's work, where the saint is not only an intercessor on the Day of Judgment, but a deliverer from more immediate threats; according to one somewhat comical narrative, Hamadānī's disciple Muḥammad Shāmī once cried out an oath by Salmān when threatened by a bear, only to be saved by the appearance of a lion, whereupon Hamadānī scolded him for not making the oath in *his* name: "Now if you again run into a lion or a bear or a demon or a boar, swear an oath by me" (Ḥaydar Badakhshī, *Manqabat*, ff. 409a–b, No. 35; noted in DeWeese, Sayyid ʿAlī 148).

[51] Ṣafī, *Rashaḥāt*, vol. I 75–76; the story affirms that as a young man, Amīr Kulāl used to wrestle in public, earning the disapproval of a pious observer who wondered why a *sayyid* would stoop to such a thing. The man was overcome at once by a vision in which it was Resurrection Day, and he was mired up to his chest in mud, whereupon the youth he had watched grasped his arms and pulled him up out of the mud; when the man regained consciousness, Amīr Kulāl looked at him through the crowd and said, in effect responding to the man's puzzlement, "I test my strength for that very day!"

> However, there is a way that comes nearer than all these; it can convey one to the goal more quickly. In it, the traveler on the path strives to make a place for himself in the heart of a saintly master through good conduct and service. Insofar as the heart of this group receives the gaze of God, a share of that gaze comes to him as well.[52]

The passage may be regarded as alluding to the disciplinary principle of *rābiṭa*, the "binding" of the disciple's heart to the master's, often through contemplation of a mental image of him, which became a key component of Naqshbandī practice;[53] but this particular statement seems only tangentially connected with this principle, since it stresses not an actual disciplinary process on the part of the disciple, but the disciple's cultivation of the master's regard for him, and the virtually automatic receipt of divine favor through participation in "the heart of this group," as achieved by affiliation with the master.

This account, and the more explicit accounts reviewed here from 'Yasawī' and 'Kubrawī' circles, do not by any means reflect full-fledged messianic claims; but they nonetheless reflect a qualitative difference from the kinds of claims made about Ṣūfī masters in earlier times, and I would argue that they should be recognized as bearing the seeds of the truly grandiose messianic claims made by, or on behalf of, particular leaders who emerged from the milieu of the doctrinal, ritual, and communal developments that characterize Ṣūfī groups, broadly understood, in this era. I would argue further that such claims, and the more extreme versions that developed in certain cases, should be understood as outgrowths of the general environment of competition among religiously-defined (or -aligned) social groups in this era, competition that compounded the existing tendencies of the more moderate or purely literary one-upmanship long evident in Ṣūfī contexts, and fostered an upward spiral of assertions about the special merits of particular shaykhs, lineages, and communities.

The competition that encouraged such increasingly expansive claims was itself the product both of the increased 'public' participation in Ṣūfī communities, with widening social circles involved in the devotional and communal aspects of Ṣūfī life, and of the increased opportunities for patronage, reflecting the interests of ruling elites needing legitimation

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[52] Ṣafī, *Rashaḥāt*, vol. I 66: *ammā rāh az īn hamma nazdīktar hast ki zūdtar ba-maqṣūd mītawān rasīd, wa ān ānast ki rawanda-yi rāh dar ān kūshad ki khūdrā ba-wāsiṭa-yi khulqī wa khidmatī dar dil-i ṣāḥib-dilī jāy kunad, chūn dil-i īn ṭā'ifa mawrid-i naẓar-i ḥaqq ast, ūrā nīz az ān naẓar naṣībī rasad.*

[53] On *rābiṭa*, see the discussion in Meier, *Zwei Abhandlungen*, and the comments of Paul, Doctrine and Organization 34–44.

and seeking an avenue for channeling the sentiments and support of constituencies tied to Ṣūfī leaders. The point, in any case, is that although there may be specific cases in which the model of longstanding (even pre-Islamic) undercurrents of 'extremist' religious thought and practice resurfacing to fuel particular messianic movements between the 14th and 17th centuries is applicable and instructive, it is important to ask whether such extreme movements might not have their roots in the more recent history of competitive rivalries among communities defined in terms of the quite diverse and usually esoteric doctrinal, ritual, and devotional currents comprising the world of Ṣūfism at the beginning of this period.

More broadly, I would argue the merits of considering a wide range of sectarian and Ṣūfī movements of this era, including Ḥurūfīs and Nuqṭawīs, a host of groups colored by Shīʿī doctrinal or devotional elements or 'Ahl al-baytism,' and various Ṣūfī movements (including some framed in terms of the Uwaysī notion, others labeled by method or spiritual mode, and perhaps a wider range of groups later framed as mainstream orders but in fact quite non-normative at their inception, such as the Naqshbandīs), as part of a doctrinal, ritual, and devotional spectrum involving, in many cases, claims of direct inspiration by God or the Prophet, or direct insight through special favor from God or the Prophet, without traditional mediators of sanctity and authority. Such groups had much in common with one another, despite the different ways—based on specific social and political environments—in which they were later 'domesticated' (or, in the frequent cases in which doctrinal or ritual interiorization had played an important role in making these movements 'marginal' in social terms, the different ways in which they were later 're-exteriorized'); it may thus do more harm than good, in terms of a historical understanding of these groups' emergence, to accentuate their separate doctrinal or social profiles, which may not have been so far apart before the era of their 'domestication' or 're-exteriorization.' In the latter regard, we may note, some such groups later had *silsila*s provided for them to fit into mainstream Ṣūfism; others had Shīʿī genealogies provided for them, to fit into specific environments; others remained on the margins or underwent even further distancing from the normative mainstream, while others retained a distinct social identity while losing the doctrinal or ritual distinctiveness that had originally set them apart. The point is that judged from the 16th or 17th century, these groups appear distinct and on widely divergent trajectories; but this appearance may be based chiefly on the later domestications rather than on their original character. Judged from the 14th and 15th centuries, they may appear remarkably similar in their social profile

and, to some extent, in their religious 'tone' (i.e., stressing direct inspiration rather than lineage-based transmission through 'tradition').

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*UMMĪ*S VERSUS IMĀMS IN ḤURŪFĪ PROPHETOLOGY: AN ATTEMPT AT A SUNNĪ/SHĪʿĪ SYNTHESIS?

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

1. Introduction: the Conception of "Motherly" (*Ummī*) Knowledge in the *Jāwidān-Nāma* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394)

> When he was close to the age of forty years, the secrets of the single letters at the beginning of the [Qurʾānic] suras [were revealed to him], [the letters] which [constitute] the heavenly book sent by God to Adam . . . He thus became a [spiritual] master and teacher. His doctrine (*iʿtiqād*) was therefore based on divine revelation (*kashf-i ilāhī*) . . . This revelation [also] concerned the secrets, truths and degrees (*asrār wa ḥaqāʾiq wa maqāmāt*) of Muḥammad . . . [He heard a voice] asking: who is this young man? Who is this moon of earth and heaven?—The answer was: He is the Master of Time, and the King of all prophets (*sayyid-i zamānast sulṭān-i hama payghambarānast*). Other people acquire their knowledge (*iʿtiqād*) of the eminence of Muḥammad's degrees through blind imitation and through explanations provided by someone else (*ba-taqlīd wa bayān-i dīgarān*), but he received this knowledge through [direct] revelation and contemplation (*kashf wa ʿiyān*).[1]
>
> In the year 775[/1374] . . . the knowledge of the spiritual exegesis of the single letters of the Qurʾān (*ʿilm-i taʾwīl-i muqaṭṭaʿāt-i Qurʾān*), as well as the secrets of the religious law (*asrār-i dīn-i sharīʿa*), such as prayer and fasting, were revealed (*kashf*) to him.[2]

This is how the disciples of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394) describe the central experience, which determined both the doctrinal production of Faḍl Allāh and the socio-political orientation of the movement that he founded.

From the cited passages, it can be concluded that Faḍl Allāh claimed to have received a personal revelation that endowed him with a status close to the prophetic degree and disclosed to him the paths of spiritual

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[1] Nafajī, *Khwāb-nāma* 66a, 68a–69b. For the German summary and partial translation of these passages see Ritter, Ḥurūfisekte 20. For an English translation slightly different from mine, see Bashir, *Fazlallah* 25–26.

[2] Sayyid Isḥāq Astarābādī, *Khwāb-nāma* 19b.

exegesis leading to the innermost meaning of the Muḥammad's prophetic message. This revelation gave Faḍl Allāh a specific vantage point on the contemporary situation of Islamic religious dogma and on the direction of its further development. He exposed his views in several works, the most important of which is the *Jāwidān-nāma* (the "Book of Eternity").[3] The *Jāwidān-nāma* is the foundational work of this movement, which came to be known, mainly through its descriptions in external sources, under the name of *Ḥurūfiyya*.[4] Along with some other works of Faḍl Allāh, this work was considered by his followers to be divinely inspired (*Jāwidān-nāma-yi ilāhī*).

Conversely to what could be expected, the *Jāwidān-nāma* does not contain any systematic presentation of Faḍl Allāh's thought. It is rather a voluminous corpus of fragments, which follow each other without any thematic organization.[5] The fragments cover nearly all the central topics of medieval religious thought, including cosmology, anthropology, prophetology and eschatology. One of the central characteristics of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is its free, creative, and in some cases surprisingly unusual interpretation of scriptural material, which includes not only the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, but also Biblical texts and apocrypha.[6] However, contrary to the opinions expressed in anti-Ḥurūfī polemics, sometimes uncritically adopted by modern scholars, the *Jāwidān-nāma* does not seem to contain any theory that is explicitly opposed to the majority dogma. On the contrary, the text arguably bears traces of an effort reconciling the competing currents of contemporary Islam, mainly focused on the Sunnī/Shīʿī rapprochement, characteristic of the post-Mongol Iranian context. As an

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[3] The *Jāwidān-nāma*, like most Ḥurūfī works, is still unpublished. An edition of a fair amount of selected fragments of this work, accompanied by a French translation and an attempt at a thematic analysis, can be found in Mir-Kasimov, *Étude.* A large selection of these fragments will be made available in English in my forthcoming book.

[4] It does not seem that Faḍl Allāh and his followers used any special name to refer to themselves, most probably because they did not regard themselves as separate from the rest of the Muslim community. However, some names and expressions used in their works, often derived from the Qurʾān, such as "possessor of the knowledge of the Book" (*man ʿindahu ʿilm al-kitāb*), "the midmost community" (*umma wasaṭ*), or others, such as "people of the Truth" (*ahl-i ḥaqq*), "people of the [divine] Bounty" (*ahl-i Faḍl*), may have a specific meaning of self-designation. See Kiyā, *Wāzha-nāma* 280. For a general introduction to Ḥurūfī history and thought, see Bashir, *Fazlallah*, which also contains the most important further references.

[5] On the particular composition of the work, which very probably reflects an intention to hinder access to its contents, see Mir-Kasimov, Jāvdān-nāma.

[6] Mir-Kasimov, *Étude; idem*, Moses.

example of this tendency, I would like to discuss, in the following pages, the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s theory of "motherly" (*ummī*) prophets.[7]

In the actual state of our knowledge of Ḥurūfī texts, the exact contents of Faḍl Allāh's claim seem difficult to reconstruct. There is no particular reason to doubt the accounts of his immediate disciples that I cited in beginning. They seem to be supported by what we know, from sources external to the movement, about the claims put forward by Faḍl Allāh, and later by his followers, in their attempts to introduce their doctrine to the rulers and political leaders of their time.[8] Also, some of the non-doctrinal texts attributed to Faḍl Allāh himself, such as his dream diary, might corroborate the thesis that he claimed a high religious status for himself.[9]

However, most of our information on the revelation received by Faḍl Allāh and on his vision of his own place in the sacred and socio-political history of Islam (and of humankind) is provided by the works of his followers or by the external sources often hostile to Faḍl Allāh.[10] The *Jāwidān-nāma* does not contain any positive information on these issues. The prophetology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems to be focused on the concept of *ta'wīl*, in the sense that this term acquired in the Shīʿī context. Let us recall that, according to Shīʿī beliefs, the *ta'wīl* is a special power given to holy Imāms, which enables them to reveal the esoteric (*bāṭin*) meanings of the prophetic revelation by bringing its exoteric (*ẓāhir*) expression back to its origin in the divine Word.[11] Applied either to the holy scriptures or to objects or beings of the empirical world, viewed as "words" in the great book of Creation, the *ta'wīl* brings them back to their ontological principle, to the existence-giving Word of the divine command. In this broad sense, *ta'wīl* can be translated as "spiritual" (or "ontological") exegesis.

One of Faḍl Allāh's disciples, Sayyid Isḥāq Astarābādī, describes the cycle of the prophetic revelation as consisting of three stages: prophecy (*nubuwwa*), sainthood (*walāya*), and the period of the direct manifestation

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[7] My account of Faḍl Allāh's doctrine is based on the ms. Oc. Or. 5957 of the British Library.

[8] On the political activity of the Ḥurūfīs see, for example, Bashir, *Fazlallah*, in particular 12–18, 20–32, 97–107; for a more detailed account, see Azhand, *Ḥurūfiyya*.

[9] See Mir-Kasimov, Journal, in particular 263–264.

[10] For these sources see, for example, Kiyā, *Wāzha-nāma*; Ritter, Ḥurūfīsekte.

[11] For the concept of *ta'wīl* in Shīʿī thought see, for example, Corbin, *En islam iranien*, index. This conception of the *ta'wīl* refers to the etymological meaning of the Arabic word, which implies "return to the beginning, to the origin" (*awwal*).

of divine truths (*ulūhiyya*).[12] The first stage was closed by Muḥammad; the second was accomplished by the holy Imāms, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. Faḍl Allāh's vocation was supposedly to open the last period, that of the *ulūhiyya*.

However, this threefold scheme is absent from the *Jāwidān-nāma*, which also rarely mentions the names of the Shīʿī Imāms other than ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[13] It seems that the traditional Shīʿī concept of Imāms, following the Prophet and revealing the inner, esoteric aspect of the revelation that he brought, is replaced, or rather extended, in the *Jāwidān-nāma* by the concept of *Ummī*s, "motherly" prophets and saints.[14] Like the Imāms in traditional Shīʿī doctrine, the *Ummī*s are essentially in charge of the *taʾwīl*, of the revelation of the innermost, metaphysical meaning of the prophetic revelations. However, the aptitude to realize the *taʾwīl* proper to the *Ummī*s is based, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, on a specific, "motherly" knowledge that they possess. This concept of "motherly" knowledge might be specific to the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

The concept of "motherly" knowledge goes back to the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s epistemological interpretation of gender differences. It can be summarized as follows.[15] According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the most complete knowledge of God available to any created being is contained in the divine Word, which is the first emanation of the unfathomable divine Essence. This Word has 28 and/or 32 aspects, named "words" (*kalima* pl. *kalimāt*).[16]

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[12] Huart, *Textes* 21–22 of the Persian text. This division is also mentioned by Golpınarlı, *Katalog* 19.

[13] The term *ulūhiyya* is only rarely used in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and the context does not justify the attribution of any specific technical meaning to it. Other historical Shīʿī Imāms mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma* are al-Ḥusayn, one of the sons of ʿAlī and the third Shīʿī Imām (f. 42a, 194a and 220a), and al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the eleventh Imām (f. 246a). Shīʿī sympathies transpire in the description of Muʿāwiya (ibn Abī Sufyān) as someone who was unable to recognize the divine Word in the person of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (f. 314b–315a), and in the mention of the "fourteen immaculate ones" (*chahārdah maʿṣūm*, f. 190b), but remain very occasional in the text.

[14] I will use the English mark of the plural, *Ummī*s, and not the Arabic (*Ummiyyūn*), to match Imāms (and not *Aʾimma*).

[15] For a more detailed presentation of this aspect of the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s doctrine, see Mir-Kasimov, RḤM.

[16] I will use *Word*, in the singular, capitalized and without quotation marks, with reference to the complete divine Word, the first emanation of the divine Essence according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and *"words,"* in the plural, uncapitalized and in quotations, with reference to the 28/32 simple entities which, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, constitute the eternal divine Word. The original term used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is *kalima* pl. *kalimāt* (sometimes replaced by the Persian *sukhan*); and the distinction between different meanings this term assumes in the theoretical developments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is only contextual. What are referred to as "words" could therefore, depending on the context, be

At a stage immediately preceding the creation of the visible universe, the Word undergoes differentiation, symbolized by the two letters of the command "Be!" (*K*^{u}*n!*). As the result of this differentiation, the 28/32 "words," hitherto unified within the single divine Word, appear as separate phonemes. Simultaneously, the black Point, the counterpart of the Word, produces 28/32 distinct forms, which are the loci of manifestation (*maẓhar* pl. *maẓāhir*) of these phonemes, or the original letters (*ḥarf* pl. *ḥurūf*). Various combinations of "words" or phonemes produce names, which are the principle of existence, ontological "ideas" or archetypes of any possible realization in the universe. The combinations of the corresponding letters are the principle of visible actualization of these ideas, the forms of the bodies. Since it is through the forms, or loci of manifestation, that ontological metaphysical truths can be perceived and known, the form of any object or being has, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the status of its "science" (*'ilm*), potentially leading to the knowledge of the metaphysical truth that brought this particular object or being into existence.[17] In this perspective, the universe is essentially writing, composed of the basic simple forms of the 28/32 original letters, and reflecting the metaphysical truths of the existence-giving divine Word.

The human bodily form occupies, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, a particular place in this diversity of forms generated by the combinations of letters. Unlike all other forms, it is generated not by a partial combination, but by the complete set of the 28/32 original letters. Therefore, the human form is the locus of manifestation not just of some "words," but of the entire divine Word, of the supreme Name of God. In other words, like the universe in its entirety, the human form is the complete Book of God, which contains all that can be possibly revealed of divine reality, the complete "science" of God. However, the Book of the human form

translated as "aspects" of the one divine Word before the differentiation, which emerge as separate "phonemes" after the differentiation. However, in order to avoid the confusion, I maintain "words" as the translation of *kalimāt*, and will further specify the meaning when necessary. Some passages emphasize that any existing object or being is part of the divine Word. In this case, "*word*" can also be used in the singular, in order to distinguish the incomplete status of any created entity from the fullness of the original Word. The relationship between the series of 28 and 32 is very flexible in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and cannot be briefly defined. I suggest that we accept the compound figure 28/32 as a symbolic representation of the inner structure of the Word; specific aspects of the relationship between the 28 and 32 relevant to our topic will be brought forth further in the text.

[17] The link between the external form of any object and being and the corresponding invisible metaphysical truth is further developed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with reference to such concepts as "divine convention" (*iṣṭilāḥ-i ilāhī*) and "line of balance" (*khaṭṭ-i istiwā'*).

contains two main aspects, corresponding to the division into two genders. Adam was created as the immediate counterpart of the complete divine Word, and his bodily form is therefore the most complete Book of God. But the *manifestation* of this Book was accomplished in the bodily form of Eve, who was created after Adam. Therefore, it is the form of Eve, that of the Mother, that represents most clearly the most fundamental elements of divine writing. It is the "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*), without which the ontological writing of the complete Book of Adam's form could never be deciphered.[18]

Another line of argumentation comes to reinforce in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the idea of the Mother as a principle of form and body: it is in the womb of Eve that the originally formless drop of sperm, issued from the loins of Adam, acquires human form. The form of the Mother is therefore the original form of any human, male or female.[19] It is the ultimate form of divine manifestation; it is the form in which God appeared to the Prophet Muḥammad.[20]

From what has been said, it can be understood that the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the form of the Mother, the aptitude to discern the fundamental lines of divine ontological writing in it, is regarded in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as the key to the spiritual exegesis of the complete Book of Adam's bodily form and to the unveiling of the metaphysical truths of the divine Word. In other words, "motherly" (*ummī*) knowledge is the key to the universal *ta'wīl*, in the sense that I attempted to outline above.

God gave Adam the full knowledge of the divine Word after shaping his bodily form as the perfect locus of manifestation of this Word: such is the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s interpretation of the Q 2:31: "He taught Adam the names, all of them".[21] After Adam, this knowledge was transmitted in the line of

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[18] For a more detailed discussion of this idea, references and a translation of the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see Mir-Kasimov, RḤM.

[19] The "form of the Mother" is symbolized, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the number seven and its multiples (14, 21, 28); this number refers to the seven lines that are visible on the faces of women as well as on the faces of children and youths of both sexes: a line of hair on the head, two lines of eyebrows, and four lines of eyelashes. These are the most fundamental features of the human face. Additional features, such as beard and moustache lines, develop only on the faces of the adult men.

[20] In this regard, the *Jāwidān-nāma* generally refers to the well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes his vision of God: "I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form, in the form of a beardless youth" (*ra'aytu rabbī fī aḥsan ṣūra fī sūrat amrad qaṭaṭ*). For the versions of this *ḥadīth* and further references see D. Gimaret, *Dieu* 154–164.

[21] Here and below, I use Arberry's translation of the Qur'ān, *The Koran Interpreted.*

the prophets.[22] It seems that the *Jāwidān-nāma* ascribes some "motherly" part to all prophets.[23] However, the mission of the prophets preceding Jesus consisted essentially of the realization of the "descent" (*tanzīl*) of the divine Word, i.e. of the progressive revelation of the 28/32 "words" (or ontological phonemes) and corresponding letters. Since the "motherly" knowledge is linked to the "ascension," to the "returning" phase of the prophetic cycle, it remained latent in their missions.

The transmission of prophetic knowledge underwent a dramatic modification with the coming of Jesus. Jesus was not just an ordinary prophet, born in accordance with the laws of human heredity. In his case, the Word of God spontaneously took the form of a human body, which is its most complete form of manifestation, in the womb of Mary.[24] Like Adam, Jesus thus represents the direct and immediate manifestation of the complete divine Word combined with the full knowledge of this Word. The fact that Mary gave birth to him without the participation of a father symbolizes, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, his particular link with "motherly" knowledge, in the sense that was outlined above. In the cycle of prophecy, Jesus inaugurates the period of the revelation of knowledge concerning the most fundamental elements of the divine Word, those manifested in the face of the Mother. He is therefore the first *ummī* prophet, preceding

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[22] The prophets are thus the "true descendents" of Adam: although any human being exteriorly inherits the human bodily form, only a few have the knowledge of its innermost meaning.

[23] Among the prophets of the Old Testament mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Joseph has a particular relationship to the *ta'wīl* and to "motherly knowledge," in line with the Qur'ānic verses that stress Joseph's aptitude in *ta'wīl* (as, for example, Q 12:101, *ta'wīl al-aḥādīth*). For references and a translation of some relevant fragments, see Mir-Kasimov, Paradise.

[24] For the discussion of the conception of Jesus in Muslim exegetical literature see Arnaldez, *Jésus*. The special role of Jesus in Ḥurūfī prophetology is highlighted by Ritter, Ḥurūfīsekte 4, and Bashir, *Fazlallah* 57–58. This particular interpretation of the conception of Jesus can also be inspired by the apocryphal Biblical text known as the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter. Indeed, several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* contain either verbatim translations or very close paraphrases from this text, reproduced in facsimile and translated by Mingana in *Woodbrooke Studies* 93–208. My thanks to Jean-Daniel Dubois for bringing this text to my attention. The passage that mentions divine light fashioned into the human shape in the womb of Mary, not cited explicitly in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, is in the p. 111 of Mingana's translation. For more details concerning the use of the Biblical material in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see my forthcoming monograph. I am also preparing a separate critical edition of the "Christian" fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*. It is noteworthy that apparently the same Apocalypse of Peter has been used, several centuries earlier, by Ismā'īlī philosopher Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, in his *Kitāb al-maṣābīḥ*. See De Smet and Van Reeth, Les citations bibliques 157–160 and al-Kirmānī, *Al-Maṣābīḥ* 24–26, 96–97. My thanks to Daniel De Smet and Paul Walker for drawing my attention to this fact.

Muḥammad.[25] We have seen that the revelation of "motherly" knowledge makes possible the spiritual exegesis of the complete Book of God, represented by the human bodily form and facial features. The "motherly" line of prophecy introduced by Jesus therefore prepares the humankind for the period of universal ontological exegesis, the *taʾwīl*, when all particles of the divine Word impregnating Creation will return to their origin within the unified divine essence.

Such seem to be the central features of Jesus' historical mission, as they emerge from the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*. However, during his historical mission, Jesus cannot reveal the fullness of his knowledge and his ontological status as the direct manifestation of the divine Word. This full revelation is forwarded to the second coming of Jesus, at which time he will assume the role of the eschatological Savior.[26] This second coming of Jesus is described in the *Jāwidān-nāma* essentially with reference to the "Book of Peter" (*kitāb-i Fiṭrūs*, or *kitāb-i Shamʿūn*).[27] It is interesting that the citations from Bible are integrated into the text of the *Jāwidān-nāma* just like the material from the Islamic scriptural sources, the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* and, in this case, included in the paradigm of "motherly" knowledge. The central episode of the eschatological mission of Jesus in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is the opening of the Book of Life, apparently identified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the sealed book of the Revelation

[25] Muḥammad is called *ummī* in Q 7:157–158. On the interpretations of this title see, for example, Günther, Ummī. Another argument used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to support the thesis of Jesus' "motherly" status is the reference to the fact that Jesus is mentioned in the Qurʾān by the name of his mother: "the son of Mary". On the expression "the son of Mary" in the Qurʾān see Robinson, Jesus. Cf. also this remark by Sijistānī, *Maqālīd* 306, in his interpretation of the letter *mīm* of the Qurʾānic combination of letters *ALM*, which comes closer to the specifically Ḥurūfī interpretation: *wa-l-mīm ʿalā ḥadd ʿIsā al-mansūb ilā ummih.*

[26] The utterance attributed to Jesus in the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is most probably a close paraphrase of John 16:25.

[27] It is interesting that, though several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* relevant to this topic look as close paraphrase of the canonical Revelation of John, they are attributed to the Book of Peter, along with other citations that are indeed found verbatim in the Mingana's recension of the Apocalypse of Peter. The name of St. John is not mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma.* For example, I was unable to find passages describing the opening of the seven seals of the apocalyptic Book, and the sacrifice of the Lamb described in the canonical Revelation of John (chapter 5 ff.) in Mingana's translation of the Apocalypse of Peter. It is possible that these passages were contained in the version of the Apocalypse of Peter available to Faḍl Allāh, or that Faḍl Allāh mistakenly attributed the citations from the Revelation of John to Peter. It is also possible that Mingana omitted them from his translation. In the following, I will therefore refer to the closest parallels from the canonical Revelation of John.

of John.[28] According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the seven seals of the Book of Life symbolize the seven fundamental features of the face of Mary. Opening the seals refers thus to the Jesus' revelation of the fundamental elements of divine ontological writing, which constitute the esoteric meaning of the form of the Mother. Through this revelation, the universal *taʾwīl* will be accomplished, and all humankind will be united within one community speaking the universal language of the divine Word represented by the human bodily form.[29] The second coming of Jesus will thus close both the period of "motherly" prophets and saints and the general cycle of revelation and return of the Word.

The mission of Muḥammad marks the end of the "descent" (*tanzīl*) of the Word. Simultaneously, the revelation of the fundamental elements of the "Mother of the Book" materializes in the text of the Qurʾān, where they appear explicitly, represented by the "Seven Twofold" (*al-sabʿ al-mathānī*) of the Opening Chapter (*Fātiḥa*) of the Qurʾān and the fourteen "isolated" letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*), appearing in various combinations in the beginning of the 29 suras.[30] According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, it is this explicit manifestation of the "Mother of the Book" that makes Muḥammad the second *ummī* Prophet after Jesus. The revelation of Muḥammad thus provides all necessary basis for the following period of the "return" (*taʾwīl*). What is more, this period had been anticipated by the heavenly ascension (*miʿrāj*) of Muḥammad, which is a powerful symbol of the *taʾwīl* in the sense of "return to the origin." Indeed, in the course of his ascension, Muḥammad met all the previous prophets, and attained the Lote-tree of the Boundary.[31] According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the Lote-tree symbolizes the cosmic form of Adam, the most perfect of all existing forms and therefore their "boundary."[32] From beyond this boundary, i.e. from the source of the pure divine Word, Muḥammad received the words of the prayer. The prayer therefore constitutes a token given to the Muslim community

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[28] Cf. Revelation, Chapter 5 ff.

[29] Cf. Revelation 5:9: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and *tongue*, and people, and nation" (the King James Bible; italics are mine).

[30] For "Seven Twofold" (or "Seven Oft-Repeated") and "Mother of the Book" as names given to the opening chapter of the Qurʾān see, for example, Graham, Fātiḥa, and Rubin, Exegesis.

[31] For general information on Muḥammad's ascension see sections of the article Miʿrādj by Schrieke, Horovitz and Bencheikh in *EI*[2]. The collective volume edited by Amir-Moezzi, *Le voyage initiatique*, contains excellent contributions on this topic.

[32] Only Adam's form is the locus of manifestation of the complete Word; there could therefore be no more perfect form.

as the foretaste of the final *taʾwīl*, which will bring all prophetic revelations to their original source within the divine Word. The true meaning of the "Mother of the Book" was also revealed to Muḥammad when God appeared to him in the form of a beardless youth.[33] As we have seen, the form of youth, either male or female, represents in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the "motherly" form, in which the fundamental lines of the divine writing can be seen most clearly.

After Muḥammad, the line of the *Ummī*s continues in the ascending phase of the cycle of the Word, that is, in the phase of the *taʾwīl*. If anything can be said about the claim of Faḍl Allāh, mentioned above, on the basis of the textual evidence of the *Jāwidān-nāma* alone, it is the implicit suggestion that this work was supposed to inaugurate the last stage of the cycle of the Word, that of the pure *taʾwīl*. It is on this stage that I will focus in the second part of this paper.

2. *Ummī* Imāms? The Figures of Ontological Exegesis (*taʾwīl*) in the *Jāwidān-nāma* and the Traditional Shīʿī Concept of Imām

> "It is He Who has raised up from among the *ummiyīn* a Messenger from among them"[34] (Q 62:2): it was necessary that they be *ummī*, and the last of them must be *ummī* (363b)

Thought it is possible that this short remark refers only to Jesus (both in his historical and eschatological missions) and Muḥammad who are, as we have seen above, explicitly qualified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as the *ummī* prophets bringing the revelation of the "motherly" knowledge, some textual evidence suggests that the category of the *Ummī*s in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is much broader and includes all figures related to the progressive realization of the *taʾwīl* in the period between the mission of Muḥammad and the second coming of Jesus at the end of time.[35] However, these figures are not very clearly described in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and the details concerning the period of the *taʾwīl* can only be obtained by the close examination and comparison of the often—and probably intentionally—allusive fragments.

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[33] See n. 20 above.

[34] I have substituted the original *ummiyīn* for Arberry's translation "common people".

[35] It is possible that the phrase "the last of them will be *ummī*" in the fragment cited above refers to this second coming of Jesus, who is thus the first and the last *ummī* prophet.

Since "motherly" knowledge is associated in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the power of the *taʾwīl*, it would be natural to expect that the conception of the *Ummī*s will be similar to the traditional Shīʿī interpretation of the Imāmate. Indeed, like the *Ummī*s of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the Shīʿī Imāms are essentially in charge of the *taʾwīl*, the revelation of the esoteric meaning of Muḥammad's message, leading to the original metaphysical dimension of the divine Word manifested in the Qurʾān and in all previous prophetic messages.[36] The concept of *taʾwīl* in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is, without doubt, identical to the Shīʿī understanding of this term. In several fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* develops doctrinal positions similar to those associated in Shīʿism with the functions of the holy Imāms but, interestingly, without any direct reference to specifically Shīʿī materials or terminology. In these fragments, apparently Shīʿī inspired conceptions are presented as commentary on the Qurʾānic verses. For example, the fragment in f. 269b suggests that the "motherly" prophets and saints are the original loci of manifestation of the fundamental ontological writing of God; they are the "well-preserved Tablet" of God in which the original nature of any possible object or being is "written." The "motherly" knowledge conveyed by these prophets and saints thus enables the receiver of this knowledge to read the divine ontological writing in everything. In other words, this knowledge is the knowledge of the universal *taʾwīl*:

> From the original nature (*khilqa*) of the "motherly" (*ummī*) ones, like Jesus son of Mary, pass [to the contemplation] of all objects [and beings], apparent and hidden (*ẓāhir wa bāṭin*), [including the] mental and imaginary [objects], and see [them all] as the divine [ontological] writing and the "word" (*kitābat wa kalima-yi khudā*) . . . The [bodily] shape [of the "motherly" ones] is the royal book and the well-preserved Tablet of God (*kitāb-i kiyā wa lawḥ-i mahfūẓ-i ilāhī*), where the being (*hastī*) of all things should be sought. In them can be read the [ontological] writing of anything . . . The [ontological] exegesis (*taʾwīl*) of any possible [object or being] and [of any image] seen in the dreams is [contained] in humans (*insān*). (269b)

Though applied to the *Ummī*s and not to Imāms, this position is identical to the general Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word and the well-preserved Tablet, a status which founds the universal ontological *taʾwīl* as the prerogative of the Imām. It is interesting that, without making any explicit reference to the Shīʿī concepts, several

[36] The term *walāya* is mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma* only very allusively, and in most fragments it is difficult to say if the author attributes any specific technical meaning to it. However, transparent allusions to the Shīʿī concept of *walāya* can be found in a few fragments of the work.

passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* highlight the link between the words *ummī* and *imām*, derived from the same Arabic root *ʾmm*. In these passages, *imām* is described as the plural of *umm* "mother," and thus associated with the conception of "mother" and "motherly knowledge" specific to the *Jāwidān-nāma*:

> "On the day when We shall call all men with their Imāms (*bi-imāmihim*)"[37] (Q 17:71) . . . [that is to say], "with their mothers," because *imām* is the plural of *umm* ["mother"], which means that they will be called to the original nature (*khilqa*) of Eve, from which it is possible to reach the original nature of Adam. (439b)

The fundamental Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the manifestation of the divine Word and spiritual Guide, the means by which the divine attributes can be known, could be alluded to in passages such as the following:

> O humans . . . you recognize your true guide (*murshid*) either in a Messenger (*rasūl*) or in an Imām . . . The Word (*kalima*) constitutes the inner truth (*ḥaqīqa*) of your Guide, who is [otherwise] a sensible being (*maḥsūs*) . . . And if you do not recognize either God, or a Messenger or Imām . . . as your true guide . . . there is no doubt that such persons will not attain the divine secrets . . . and do not deserve to be followed. (383a)

The conception of the Imām as the manifestation of the divine Word is also developed in other fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, still without any explicitly Shīʿī reference. The Imām is assimilated to the Qurʾān and to Jesus, because all three are the direct manifestations of the divine Word: " 'Everything We have numbered in a clear register (*imām*)' (Q 36:12). The Qurʾān is the Word (*kalima*), the Word is Imām, and Jesus is the Word" (177a).

The *Jāwidān-nāma* develops its interpretation of the Imām as holy book revealed to the prophets along the same lines. Though the Shīʿī influence is strongly suggested, it remains implicit in the relevant fragments, which refer essentially to the Qurʾānic passages where the word *imām* is used with the meaning "book, register," given to the prophets as guide. It is possible that the purpose of these fragments is not only to conceal the Shīʿī inspiration of the work, but also to integrate specifically Shīʿī doctrines into the broader Islamic context.[38] The following passage is an example of such an interpretation:

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[37] I have replaced Arberry's "record" by the original *Imām*.

[38] I will discuss in the Conclusion how the effort to reconcile the Sunnī/Shīʿī doctrinal frictions could be part of the general messianic project of the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

> The Messenger said: "Whoever has died without having known the Imām of his time has died the death of the ignorant"[39] . . . From this *ḥadīth*, it can be concluded that there is no age without an Imām, and the Imām of every age is the holy book of this age, for [it is said]: "Yet before it was the Book of Moses for a model (*imām*) and a mercy" (Q 46:12), and "Everything We have numbered in a clear register (*imām*)" (Q 36:12). Therefore, this "Imām" refers to the Qurʾān and to all [other] holy books. It is thus necessary to know the Imām, which is the holy book. And the Qurʾān is the Imām, because it explains the essence (*dhāt*), the attributes (*ṣifāt*) [of God], the origin and the return (*mabdāʾ wa maʿād*), the science of the without-beginning and without-end (*ʿilm-i azal wa abad*), the past and the future (*mā kāna wa mā yakūn*). (430a–b)

The same ambiguity, bridging the gaps between specifically Shīʿī doctrines and views generally admitted in the Muslim community, can be seen in passages which, starting from the most neutral description of the Imām as the person who leads the prayer, evolve towards the Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the visible Face of God. The argumentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma* underlying this interpretation of the figure of the Imām can be summarized as follows. An Imām who leads the prayer performs his prayer in the *miḥrāb*, with his face turned towards Mecca and Kaʿba. The mosque symbolizes the human body, where the *miḥrāb* corresponds to the face. In accordance with the well-known *ḥadīth*, God created Adam's head from the earth collected at the location of the Kaʿba.[40] Therefore, like the *miḥrāb*, the Kaʿba symbolizes the human face, the locus of manifestation of the complete divine ontological writing and, more particularly, the locus of manifestation of the most fundamental, "motherly" lines of this writing. This is why the Kaʿba is surnamed "the Mother of the cities" (*umm al-qurā*).[41] This last point also supports the thesis of the "motherly," *ummī* quality of the Imām, which is alluded to in the passages cited above (f. 439b). Thus, during the prayer, the truth of the divine Word and the fundamental "motherly" knowledge of the ontological writing manifests itself on the face of the Imām, and this is the essential reason for which, during the ritual prayer, the Imām faces the Kaʿba, the source of "motherly" knowledge, and for which the believers prostrate themselves *behind* the Imām.

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[39] *Man māta wa lam yaʿrif imām zamānih fa-qad māta mayta jāhiliyya.*

[40] For this *ḥadīth*, see Kister, Adam 133–134.

[41] On this expression, see Bosworth, Umm al-Ḳurā. For the Nuṣayrī identification of *Umm al-qurā* with Fāṭima see Friedman, Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs 137–8.

> Concerning the Imāmate. The mosque is a representation of the human form (*mithāl-i ṣūrat-i insān*), and the *miḥrāb* is the representation of the face. There is the place of the *imām.* In accordance with the religious law (*sharīʿa*), nobody can stand either before the *imām*, or at his right or left. The true *imām* (*imām-i ḥaqīqī*), of whom the visible *imām* (*imām-i ẓāhirī*) is locum tenens (*qāʾim-maqām*), faces his own representation, which is the Kaʿba.[42] Nobody stands *next* to the *imām*; all the attendance performs the prostrations *behind* him. In a sense, they perform their prostrations before the *imām*, while he [the *imām*] prostrates himself before his own representation: not before his own representation as such, but before this divine truth (*ḥaqīqat-i khudāʾī*) which is manifested (*tajallī*) in him. The *miḥrāb* is thus established as [representing] the form of the original nature (*ṣūrat-i khilqa*), the location of the unique person (*shakhṣ*) who is the *imām.* (150a)

The Shīʿī inspiration behind doctrinal views in several other fragments is still more explicit, because they are developed with reference to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Shīʿī Imām. The choice of ʿAlī, with almost no mention of any other historical Imām, is understandable if, as is confirmed by other evidence in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Faḍl Allāh wanted to avoid any straightforward manifestation of his Shīʿī sympathies.[43] ʿAlī, the cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community, is also a much respected figure in Sunnī Islam. However, the doctrines related in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to the figure of ʿAlī are unmistakably of Shīʿī origin.

In the cosmological scheme of the differentiation and descent of the divine Word that I have briefly outlined in the first part of this paper, ʿAlī personifies the black Point, the first visible expression of the Word and the original science (*ʿilm*) of the Word. We have also seen that the concept of science seems identical in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to that of "locus of manifestation" (*maẓhar*). The Word can only be known through its visible manifestations, and the origin of all visible manifestations, including writing, is the original Point: this Point is ʿAlī. Some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* establish a link between ʿAlī and the Imāmate: "[ʿAlī] said: 'I am the point under *bā*'.' Whoever knows the point knows ʿAlī, and whoever knows the Qurʾān and the Point knows the Imām of his time" (232b). Since the Point is the origin of divine ontological writing, ʿAlī symbolizes the source of any prophetic book; any revealed Book will eventually return to the

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[42] This passage from the "visible" to the "true" Imām marks the beginning of the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s interpretation of the exoteric figure of the Imām outlined in the beginning of this fragment.

[43] Cf. n. 13 above.

truth represented by ʿAlī through the operation of the ontological *taʾwīl*. In other words, he is the living "science of the Word," which constitutes the innermost, esoteric meaning of the prophetic books. In the relevant fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* explicitly uses utterances attributed to ʿAlī and *ḥadīth* materials particularly popular in Shīʿī circles:

> ʿAlī said: "I am the speaking Book (*kitāb-i nāṭiq*), and this [the Qurʾān] is the silent book (*kitāb-i ṣāmit*)"; "and with Us is a Book speaking truth" (Q 23:62) . . . [ʿAlī] is thus the true speaking Word (*kalām-i nāṭiq bi-ḥaqīqa*), while the soot and the blackness [of the ink] constitute the metaphorical, silent Word (*kalām-i ṣāmit bi-majāz*) . . . And the Messenger said: "I fought for the descent (*tanzīl*) [of the Word], while ʿAlī will fight for its return (*taʾwīl*)," and he also said: "I and ʿAlī, we are the same light".[44] (184a)

The theme of ʿAlī as the speaking Word of God is further developed in other fragments, for example:

> ʿAlī is "touched in the essence of God" (*mamsūs fī dhāt Allāh*), for he said: "I am the Word of God" (*anā kalām Allāh*), and Word is an attribute of the essence (*ṣifat-i dhātī*) of the speaker; it cannot be separated from the speaker. God has an essence, and the Word is its inseparable attribute, and ʿAlī said: "I am the speaking Word of God" (*anā kalām Allāh al-nāṭiq*). (383b–384a)

What is more, even if the names of historical Imāms other than ʿAlī occur very rarely in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, as I mentioned above, some fragments state that knowledge of the *taʾwīl* will be transmitted in the line of the descendents of ʿAlī: " 'The day its [Book's] interpretation (*taʾwīl*) comes' (Qur. 7:53), and [Muḥammad] said that ʿAlī will fight for the *taʾwīl*: this means that [the knowledge] of the *taʾwīl* was given to ʿAlī, i.e. to his descendents." (206a–b)

Some of the interpretations of the word *imām* that were mentioned in the previous citations without any specifically Shīʿī reference, such as the identification of the Imām with the prophetic books in general and with the Qurʾān in particular, with the divine Word and with Jesus (cf. fragments 177a and 430a–b above), are also developed, in other fragments, with direct references or very transparent allusions to ʿAlī. The following fragment states almost explicitly that ʿAlī is Imām. Although, significantly, the name ʿAlī is not mentioned in this fragment, he is referred to by a well-known utterance attributed to him. If we recall that, according to the

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[44] It is remarkable that, in this fragment, the words of ʿAlī and Muḥammad are cited in the Astarābādī dialect, instead of the original Arabic, which could indicate a concern with *taqiyya*.

Jāwidān-nāma, Jesus is the first *ummī* prophet, the implicit identification ʿAlī = Jesus = Imām gives us another example of the close link between the concepts *ummī* and *imām*:

> "The Qurʾān is my *imām*" (*al-Qurʾān imāmī*): [the Qurʾān] is the soot and blackness [of the ink, the support of the visible writing, which constitutes] the science [of the divine Word]. [During prayer], it is convenient to turn the face in this direction, because the soot and blackness [of the writing] lead to the Word (*kalima*). The Imām is the person [referred to by the expressions]: "I am the speaking Word of God" (*anā kalām Allāh al-nāṭiq*) and "His Word that He committed to Mary" (Q 4:171). Therefore, the Word is Imām, and . . . "whoever is dead without having known the Imām of his time died the death of the ignorant."[45] This means that whoever does not know the Word of his time is an unbeliever (*kāfir*). "I am the speaking Word of God," "everything We have numbered in a clear register (*fī imām mubīn*)" (Q 36:12), i.e. "in the clear Word" (*ay fī kalima mubīn*). (189a–b)

Another essential aspect of the Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate, namely the Imāmate as the completion or fulfillment of the prophetic mission, is also developed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with a cautious reference to ʿAlī.[46] The central scriptural reference used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* in order to emphasize the link between the idea of the fulfillment of the divine Word and the status of Imām is the Qurʾānic passage 2:124: "And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them. He said, 'Behold, I make you a leader (*imām*) for the people.' " From this citation, the *Jāwidān-nāma* concludes that "the Imāmate and the fulfillment of the [divine] words (*kalimāt*) . . . are interrelated" (10a). However, the role of "fulfilling" Muḥammad's mission is ascribed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to ʿAlī. More precisely, ʿAlī symbolizes four primordial "words" that, added to the 28 "words" represented by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, revealed in the Qurʾān, will complete the revelation of the 32 aspects of the divine Word:[47] "ʿAlī . . . is the locum tenens (*qāʾim-maqām*) of these

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[45] The paraphrase in the Astarābādī dialect precedes in this passage the citation of the Arabic text of the tradition, which we have already seen in fragment 430a–b above.

[46] This aspect of the Imāmate is particularly stressed in the Ismāʿīlism. See, for example, Halm, *Kosmologie* 25.

[47] For the 28/32 "words" cf. n. 16 above. The four additional "words" which, added to the 28 "words" symbolized by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet composing the Qurʾān, fulfil the revelation of the 32 "words" of the complete Word, are often referred to, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the names of four letters added to the Arabic alphabet in order to express sounds specific to Persian (*chīm, pā', zhā'* and *gāf*). This is certainly an argument in favour of the thesis that Faḍl Allāh would have advocated the sacredness of the Persian language. However, this thesis is not formulated explicitly in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

four [primordial] 'words.' The manifestation of these four 'words' will realize [the condition] of universal unification" (377b).

Another concept which describes in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the category of people responsible for realizing and revealing the knowledge of the complete Word in the period following Muḥammad's mission is that of Witness (*shahīd* pl. *shuhadā'*). Unlike *imām*, the word *shahīd* is not derived from the Arabic root *'mm*, and thus cannot be directly associated with the "motherly" ones, the *Ummī*s. However, such an association is suggested in several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the intermediary of another term formed from the root *'mm*, namely *umma.* The general meaning of this term is "people, nation, religious community."[48] However, in the Qur. 16:120 this term is applied to a single person, Abraham, most probably with the meaning "model."[49] The *Jāwidān-nāma* highlights the link between the act of witnessing and *umma*, established in the Qur'ān with reference to the community of Muḥammad, and suggests that *umma* can also mean the quality of an individual witness, just as this term is used to describe Abraham:

> "Thus We appointed you a midmost nation [that you might be witnesses to the people]" (Q 2:143)... A Witness (*shahīd*) of this [Muḥammad's] nation (*umma*) is a person to who belongs the "science of the Book" (*'ilm-i kitāb ba-ū 'ā'id bāshad*). If someone says that [the Qur'ānic verse] mentions a nation (*umma*) [of witnesses, and not a single person], the answer is: "Surely, Abraham was a nation (*umma*) obedient unto God, a man of pure faith and no idolater" (Q 16:120) (77a–b).

We have already seen an example of the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse where Abraham is qualified as *imām.*[50] This could suggest a link between the concepts of witness and *imām.* However, the essential comparison between "witnesses" and *imāms* is based not on etymological developments, but on the similarity of their respective functions in the period of the *ta'wīl.* The Qur'ānic description of the witnesses as belonging to the "midmost nation" is used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as a reference to one of the central conceptions of this work, that of "Balance" (*istiwā'*). The principle of Balance, which I briefly mentioned at

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[48] For the meanings of this term in the Qur'ān, see Denny, Community and Society, *idem*, Ummah.

[49] On the interpretations of the term *umma* in this verse, see Singh and Agwan, *Encyclopaedia* 1535.

[50] Cf. the fragment from f. 10a above.

the beginning of this paper,[51] governs in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the paradoxical correspondence between the divine and the human, the metaphysical truth of the Word and the visible form, the hidden meaning and its external manifestation. Balance is associated with the divine attributes of Equity (*qisṭ*) and Justice (*ʿadl*). The line of Balance (*khaṭṭ-i istiwāʾ*) of any visible form reveals the divine ontological writing in it and makes it possible to discern, or "read," the "words" of the divine ontological language which constitute the innermost meaning of this form. In other words, Balance is the ultimate key to the *taʾwīl*.[52] It is the discovery of this line of Balance, omnipresent in the universe, that enables a human being to witness the unity of God and thus join the "midmost nation":

> "God bears witness that there is no god but He" (Q 3:18). O seeker, [in this verse] God bears witness to Himself that there is no god but He. As far as you have not realized that [Adam, Power without beginning and the Word] mentioned above are one and the same, how can you know how He bore this witness? In as much as you stay in this condition, you are certainly not He, and therefore, you cannot know Him as He is, and cannot bear witness to His oneness based on your personal realization (*taḥqīq*). In as much as you did not experience the being of all existing beings (*wujūd-i jamīʿ-yi mawjūdāt*), and became identical to all [kinds] of beings (*ʿayn-i wujūd-i hama*), [in as much as] you did not draw the line of balance (*khaṭṭ-i istiwāʾ*) of all beings and become identical to this line of balance, how can you contemplate [Him] "upholding justice (*qāʾiman bi-l-qisṭ*)" (Q 3:18)? How can you become "endowed with the knowledge" (*ūlū al-ʿilm*), and bear witness on the basis of your personal spiritual realization (*taḥqīq*) in accordance with what God said [in the verse]: "God bears witness that there is no god but He—and the angels, and men possessed of knowledge—upholding justice" (Q 3:18). But when you attain the abovementioned knowledge, you become "possessed of knowledge," and join the midmost nation, and can therefore bear witness on the basis of your personal realization. And the Messenger . . . can then bear witness to your truthfulness (*ṣidq*), without any doubt or hesitation.[53] You must hear permanently, with hearing free of doubt (*bi-samʿ-i yaqīn*), the call: "Am I not your Lord?" (Q 7:172), coming from the Lord (*rabb*), or from the Father (*ab*), or from Adam, or from the Back (*ẓahr*), or from the Power (*quwwa*), which are all one and the same thing, and you must hear and contemplate, with hearing and knowledge free of doubt (*bi-samʿ wa ʿilm-i yaqīn*), the answer "Yes!" coming not only from the

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[51] Cf. n. 17.

[52] A detailed presentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s description of the principle of Balance and its various manifestations would exceed the limits of this paper. See Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 90–121, *The Language of Birds*, Glossary and Index, "Balance".

[53] This is an allusion to Q 2:143, cited at the end of this fragment.

> spirits of Adam's descendents, but from [every] atom of existing [beings and objects] (*az dharrāt-i mawjūdāt*), from the apparent and the hidden (*ẓāhir wa bāṭin*), from [anything] actual and potential (*bi-l-fi'l wa bi-l-quwwa*), from the living and the dead, in dream, when awake, and in imagination, from the speaking and the silent (*nāṭiq wa ṣāmit*), from mineral, plant and animal. Then, you can also bear witness on the part of all of them, that all existing [objects and beings] answer "Yes!" [when questioned by God]: "Am I not your Lord?" and that they all recognize [God as their Lord]. In as much as you did not realize the abovementioned condition, how can you bear witness to the delivery (*tablīgh*) of the prophetic messages? How will you join the midmost nation? And how can the Messenger bear witness to your truthfulness, as it is said: "[Thus We appointed you a midmost nation (*ummatan wasaṭan*) that you might be witnesses to the people,] and that the Messenger might be a witness to you" (Q 2:143)? (473b–474a)

Since, as I mentioned in the first part of this paper, the human form is the most perfect manifestation of the divine ontological writing, the aptitude to witness, in the sense specified above, is closely linked in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to self-knowledge.[54] Let us recall that, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the human form is based on "motherly" knowledge. We could, therefore, expect a link between the aptitude to witness and "motherly" knowledge. It seems that such a link is, indeed, suggested by some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, in particular with reference to the symbolic meaning of the Ka'ba and the Black Stone, which was already mentioned in the discussion of the term *imām* above. This symbol also points to an interesting aspect of possible relationship between witness and *imām.* Fragment 473b–474a refers to the witnessing described in the Qur'ānic verse 7:172, usually interpreted as an allusion to the primordial Covenant (*mīthāq*).[55] According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the prototypes of humans extracted from the loins of Adam were able to bear witness both on their own selves and on their Lord because, in this particular circumstance, they contemplated the form of Adam as the locus of manifestation of the 32 ontological "words" of the divine Word, and thus realized their own original nature as a copy of the Word:

> "[And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves], 'Am I not your Lord?' " (Q 7:172). Of course, they answered: "Yes, we testify," because they saw that

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[54] As it could be expected, the well-known *ḥadīth* "he who knows his own self, knows his Lord" (*man 'arafa nafsah faqad 'arafa rabbah*) is frequently cited in the fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* related to this topic.

[55] Cf. Böwering, Covenant.

> Adam had been created in accordance with the number of the 32 divine "words" (280b).

The Covenant therefore represents the archetype of witnessing, which founds the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s concept of witness. In several other fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* refers to the beliefs according to which the Covenant was enclosed in the Black Stone, from which it will reappear in the end of time.[56] The Black Stone, preserved inside the Kaʿba, is therefore a token and a reminder of the Covenant and of the original Witness. The following fragment ascribes this belief to ʿAlī, and at the same time develops the idea of a link between the Kaʿba, the Imām and "motherly" knowledge with regard to the Covenant:

> ʿAlī said, with regard to the Black Stone, that the Covenant of the descendents of Adam was enclosed in this stone, [and] will appear from it [in the end of time]. And the Imām will appear from the Kaʿba,[57] which is the "Mother of the cities" (*umm al-qurā*) and the mother of the earth in its entirety (*umm-i hama arḍ ast*). [Indeed], the Imām must come forth from the origin (*aṣl*) . . .: "those who follow the Messenger, the *ummī* Prophet"[58] (Q 7:157). (245a–b)

The witness of the "midmost nation" will also be based on the knowledge of the secret of the Kaʿba, which is the secret of the divine ontological writing in the universe:

> The nation of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, is [according to Q 2:143] the "midmost nation." . . . because this nation is the most truthful (*khayr-i ḥaqīqa*), and the most truthful nation is that which will reach the centre of all heavens, of the earth, of the Kaʿba and of the lines [of ontological writing] of things. The Kaʿba is the centre of the earth, and his nation will reach the secret of the Kaʿba. (459b)

These fragments suggest, albeit indirectly, a fundamental link between Witnesses, Imāms and "motherly" knowledge of the basic lines of the divine writing leading to the knowledge of the complete Word. The link with the "motherly" aspect of the knowledge of the Word is further developed in the fragments concerning the "witnesses" from the community of Muḥammad. Indeed, since the aptitude to witness is related in the *Jāwidān-nāma* essentially to self-knowledge, it can potentially be attained through a personal realization at any moment in history. However, such

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[56] Cf. Kister, Adam 159–161.

[57] For beliefs concerning the appearance of the Imām/Mahdī/Qā'im in Mecca, near Kaʿba, see Cook, *Studies* 203, Sachedina *Messianism* 74–77.

[58] "*Ummī* Prophet" replaces here Arberry's "Prophet of the common folk".

a realization becomes a hallmark of the period of *taʾwīl* following the explicit revelation of the "Mother of the Book," of the foundations of the divine Word in the mission of Muḥammad. From this point on, the "midmost community" refers specifically to the true believers belonging to the community founded by Muḥammad, to the extent that they realize the "motherly" knowledge of the foundations of the Word included in his prophetic message. This realization makes them witnesses for all humankind:

> This science of the creation of things (*ʿilm-i khilqat-i ashyāʾ*) [by the means of the 28 and 32 letters produced by the command "Be!" (*kun!*)] had to appear in the religion [established] by the *ummī* Prophet [i.e. Muḥammad, allusion to Q 7:157 and 158], in the midmost [position]: "Thus We appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people" (Q 2:143). (75a–b)

The eschatological functions ascribed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to the "witnesses" echo Shīʿī beliefs concerning the Qāʾim, the last Imām expected at the end of time. The "witnesses" will explain the true, esoteric meaning of the "clear" (*muḥkam*) and "ambiguous" (*mutashābih*) verses of the Qurʾān, of the Muslim ritual, of the images of Muḥammad's heavenly ascension. They will disclose the secrets of the Resurrection and prepare the second coming of Jesus (87a–b). They will explicitly reveal all that was mentioned in the Qurʾān in indirect and allusive language, and the people will recognize that their knowledge comes directly from an authentic source, not from "blind imitation" (*taqlīd*) (277a–b). Like the Imāms, the Witnesses will be initiated into the innermost truth of Muḥammad's revelation and, with reference to a well-known *ḥadīth*, lead the only group destined for salvation from the 73 groups resulting from the division of the Muslim community.[59]

> [The Prophet] said: "my witness (*shahīd*), who will [bear witness] to my message, will be a person referred to, in the divine speech, as 'possessor of the science of the Book' (*wa man ʿindah ʿilm al-kitāb*). This witness will testify my truthfulness [or 'the [esoteric] truth [of my message'] (*ḥaqīqat-i man*). God will show him my knowledge and [inner] truths (*ʿilm wa ḥaqāʾiq*), so that [all] creatures (*khalāʾiq*) and the descendents of Adam will clearly see that this person comes from God. He will be the path to the divine knowledge (*ʿilm-i khudā*), and he will know the group destined for salvation (*firqa nājiya*)." (457b)

[59] On this *ḥadīth* and its interpretations in different currents of Islam, see van Ess, *Beobachtungen* 7 ff.

The Shīʿī distinction between the terms *ṣāḥib al-tanzīl*, referring to the prophets responsible for the "descent" (*tanzīl*) of the divine Word in their respective revelations, and *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl*, referring to the Imāms responsible for the Return to the origin (*taʾwīl*) of the Word can also be found in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.[60] Just as we have seen in the case of the term *imām*, the term *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl* is used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* without any explicitly Shīʿī reference, and integrated into the doctrine of the cycle of the Word determined by its 28 and 32 aspects or "words" specific to this work. Some passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* suggest that the *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl* will reveal 32 primordial "words." Added to the 28 "words" revealed by Muḥammad who, in his quality as the "seal of the prophets" closes the "descent" of the Word, the "words" of the *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl* will reach the number 60, representing the cosmic body of Adam and the complete Book of God.[61] The following two passages describe the role of the *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl*:

> "Sixty poor persons," "two successive months" (Q 58:4): sixty days [of the two months] refer to the sixty cubits of the height of Adam.[62] 28 [primordial] "words" were revealed in the language of the master of the "descent" (*ṣāḥib-i tanzīl*), and 32 in the language of the master of the "return" (*ṣāḥib-i taʾwīl*). Whoever has such a height, matches the height of Adam and will enter paradise. (189b)
>
> The single elements of the divine "words" (*mufradāt-i kalimāt-i ilāhī*) were manifested (*tajallī*) for the first time in the person of Adam, because "He taught Adam the names, all of them" (Q 2:31). Adam was the father of humankind, and angels bowed down before him. After [Adam], the same single elements were manifested in the bodily form of the Seal (*dar wujūd-i khātim*). [This last manifestation] sealed the source (*mabdāʾ*) [from which the revelation "descended," and initiated] the return (*maʿād*). The same [single elements] come and manifest themselves in the locus of manifestation of the master of the return (*dar maẓhar-i ṣāḥib-i taʾwīl*), which accomplishes the task. As far as God exists, humans and the human form (*insān wa ṣūrat-i insān*) will exist. Adam was in the beginning, and in the end there

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[60] Faḍl Allāh is often mentioned in the works of his disciples with the title *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl*. In the case of Faḍl Allāh, this title refers to his specific spiritual experience, when the innermost meaning of the letters of the alphabet as the starting point of the universal *taʾwīl* was disclosed to him. It is interesting that, notwithstanding this evidence from the later Ḥurūfī works, Faḍl Allāh did not explicitly apply the title *ṣāḥib al-taʾwīl* to himself in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

[61] This "complementary" perspective on the relationship between the 28 "words" of the *tanzīl* and the 32 "words" of the *taʾwīl* coexists in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the "inclusive" one, according to which the 28 "words" will be completed by the four additional "words" up to the number 32. The similar interpretation was mentioned above with reference to ʿAlī.

[62] For this *ḥadīth*, see Kister, Adam 139.

> are the Seal and the master of the return. All three are one and the same person . . . The ultimate goal of the revolution of the heavenly sphere around the earth is to realize the manifestation of Adam. (236b in margin)

The passages cited above do not contain any reference to the identity of the *ṣāḥib-i taʾwīl*. We have already seen that several passages indicate ʿAlī as the person charged with the *taʾwīl* after the completion of Muḥammad's mission. However, the central figure in the eschatology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is Jesus in his second coming.[63] Jesus will teach the *taʾwīl* and show that the forms of all existent objects and beings are the loci of manifestation of the ontological "words":

> Jesus said . . . [that he will come] in order to lead people to perfection (*kamāl*), to teach the *taʾwīl* (*taʿlīm-i taʾwīl*), and to teach that all existing objects and beings (*mawjūdāt*) were brought into existence by the Word (*kalām wa sukhan*), and that they are all loci of manifestation (*maẓhar*) of the divine Word. (426a)

3. Conclusion

The *Jāwidān-nāma* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī contains an original conception of "motherly" (*ummī*) prophecy and sainthood, which is very probably an extension of the traditional Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate.[64] The specific features which distinguish *ummī*s from *imām*s, such as the starting point (Jesus for the *ummī*s and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib for the *imām*s), and the reference to "motherly" knowledge, in the sense discussed above, rely implicitly, as does the *Jāwidān-nāma* in general, on the personal revelation claimed by Faḍl Allāh. In other words, personal revelation is expected to provide Faḍl Allāh with the authority necessary to undertake his modification of the traditional Shīʿī doctrine.

Was this modification purely doctrinal or did it also have a socio-political dimension? From what we know about Faḍl Allāh's biography, it appears that political ambitions were not foreign to him. This is also confirmed by

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[63] It is impossible to discuss the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s eschatology in any detail within the limits of this article. For the eschatological role of Jesus in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 356–394.

[64] Some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* concerning the relationships between the prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and sainthood (*walāya*) seem to contain traces of Ibn al-ʿArabī's terminology. However, immediate Shīʿī inspiration seems predominant in the *Jāwidān-nāma*. The issue of various Ṣūfī and Shīʿī influences that could have affected the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s doctrinal developments is addressed in my forthcoming monograph.

the history of the Ḥurūfī movement after his death. Arguably, the persecutions and accusations of heresy leveled against the Ḥurūfīs reflected an "orthodox" response to their political activities, not to their elaborate and little known doctrines. This active political involvement is a natural consequence of their messianic orientation, in the sense that any messianic leader believes that his or her doctrine will usher in a new period in the history of his community, or even of all humankind, and therefore has the vocation of being generally accepted, as the only true religion.

As a messianic leader, Faḍl Allāh was not an exception to this rule, and the *Jāwidān-nāma* contains many traces of an effort to present Islam as a universal religion, which in its final phase will overcome all inner divisions and even encompass other religious traditions, in particular Judaism and Christianity. This ecumenical intention of the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems discernible behind extensive commentaries on Biblical texts and Christian (and Jewish?) apocrypha, side by side with the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth.* The belief that the Savior will establish a universal religion is part of Muslim messianic expectations, both Sunnī and Shīʿī.

The modification of the traditional Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate, one of the most important points of discord between the Shīʿīs and the Sunnīs, could be a step along the same universalist lines, aiming at the unification of the Muslim community. The *Jāwidān-nāma*'s conception of *ummī* prophets and saints indeed preserves the idea of *taʾwīl*, in the sense of ontological exegesis operating the return of the prophetic revelation to its origin in the divine Word. This idea is fundamental to the Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate. But, instead of attributing the function of the *taʾwīl* directly to the Imāms, the *Jāwidān-nāma* makes it unfold in the line of the *Ummī*s, which begins and finishes with Jesus. The specifically Shīʿī coloration of this doctrine is further attenuated by linking the *taʾwīl* to "motherly" knowledge, with particular reference to the generally admitted interpretation of the "mother of the book" (*umm al-kitāb*) as the prototype, summary or foundation of the Qurʾān.[65] The same holds true with regard to the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s presentation of the figure of the Imām: while the specifically Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the locus of manifestation of the divine attributes, the visible Face of God, is preserved, it is attenuated by the reference to the general, neutral meaning of this word as "leader of prayer" or "prophetic book." The eschatological role of the last Imām, the Qāʾim, while it is alluded to in some passages related to ʿAlī, is expressed

[65] For the meaning of the expression *umm al-kitāb* see, for example, Madigan, Book.

more explicitly with reference to the figure of the Witness from the nation of Muḥammad, and, essentially, with reference to Jesus, in accordance with Sunnī beliefs concerning the second coming of Jesus.[66]

The *Jāwidān-nāma*'s conception of the *Ummīs* could therefore represent an example of the modification of the Shīʿī norm, preserving and developing all the essential points of esoteric Shīʿism as the basis of a doctrine aiming at the unification of the Muslim community, in a messianic perspective addressing non-Muslim religious traditions as well. The doctrine of the *Jāwidān-nāma* could thus be regarded as one of the early post-Mongol intellectual and theological developments providing a frame for the messianic and universalist tendency, which was a hallmark of this period and which, as it will be shown in more detail in the following chapters, played a central role in the emergence and consolidation of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires.

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[66] For the Sunnī emphasis on Jesus as the eschatological Savior, as opposed to the Shīʿī insistence on the idea that the Savior will come from the Family of the Prophet, see Reynolds, Jesus.

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THE OCCULT CHALLENGE TO PHILOSOPHY AND MESSIANISM IN EARLY TIMURID IRAN: IBN TURKA'S LETTRISM AS A NEW METAPHYSICS

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Few topics in late medieval Islamicate intellectual and religious history are more neglected, with less justice, than the theory and practice of lettrism. This is curious, since few topics are more contested. Was it a mainstream and scientific-philosophical pursuit, as its proponents aver, or transgressive, heterodox and anarchic, as its critics charge? Much of the confusion stems from the identification of late medieval lettrism in polemical sources and much of modern scholarship with the Ḥurūfī movement founded by Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), whose gnostic-messianic-Ṣūfī tenor was certainly transgressive, utopian, and in some later strains revolutionary and post-Islamic. Yet the vigor and flamboyance of Ḥurūfī doctrine did not kindle in a vacuum; rather, they testify to the wider religiocultural valency of lettrism in the Islamicate heartlands from the late medieval to modern periods.[1] As a corrective, this paper emphasizes the existence of a *mainstream* and *intellectual* form of lettrism. This lettrism served as a choice vehicle for the millenarian, universalist impulses of the period, and as such achieved wide currency among its leading thinkers, from Anatolia to Egypt, from Iran to India.

I take as an outstanding but representative example Ṣā'in al-Dīn ʿAlī Turka of Iṣfahān (770–835/1369–1432), the foremost occult philosopher of early Timurid Iran, whose lettrist thought constitutes the centerpiece of his universalist project.[2] (Briefly put, occult philosophy refers to the neoplatonic-neopythagorean quest to comprehend the cosmos using all available means, whether rational or mystical, scientific or magical, in concert. The term encompasses "the entirety of the 'occult sciences,'" including lettrism, astrology, alchemy and natural magic, "provided that these are

[1] Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi* 66–9.

[2] This paper is largely adapted from the present writer's dissertation (Melvin-Koushki, The Quest). For Ṣā'in al-Dīn's biography and list of works see A. Jūdī-Niʿmatī's introduction to her edition of the *Sharḥ-i Naẓm al-Durr*, Ṣā'in al-Dīn's ornate and influential commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's (d. 632/1235) *Tā'iyya al-kubrā*; and Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 2–158.

understood not only as practical disciplines but as integral parts of a comprehensive religious philosophy and cosmology on neoplatonic, hermetic and kabbalistic foundations.")[3] Despite his occultist agenda, Ṣā'in al-Dīn cannot be dismissed as a fringe thinker; from the perspective of the later 9th/15th and early 10th/16th centuries, he and his disciple Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī (d. 858/1454), the preeminent historian, occultist and mathematician, were accounted the two leading intellectuals of Shahrukhid Iran.[4] Ṣā'in al-Dīn states that many of the tribulations he endured were a product of simple scholarly jealousy, for, in contrast to the stodgy, reactionary schoolmen and Ṣūfis (*rasm-jūyān-i madrasa u khānaqāh*) of his day,[5] he himself is a

> seeker of knowledge whose writings are borne abroad by the north and east winds and are well received in all regions and on all shores, with travelers from India (*Hindustān*) and Anatolia being dispatched in search of copies of his treatises and books, and whose students come to him from all lands, including Shiraz, Samarkand, Anatolia and India (*Hind*).[6]

It is true that Ibn Turka has been acclaimed from the 13th/19th century onward as an important synthesizer of peripatetic-illuminationist philosophy and mystical theory linking Ibn ʿArabī (d. 635/1250) with Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640),[7] this largely on the strength of his influential *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*;[8] indeed, ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1402/1981) ranks

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[3] Hanegraaff, *Dictionary of Gnosis* 886–7, s.v. "Occult/Occultism."

[4] See e.g. Dawlatshāh, *Tadhkirat al-shuʿarā* 340, 384. For Yazdī's biography and sociopolitical and intellectual context see Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn 19–174.

[5] *R. Anjām*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 159b.

[6] Nafthat al-Maṣdūr II 209–10.

[7] See e.g. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy* 209–10; Cooper, From al-Ṭūsī 591; Ziai, Recent Trends 413–5.

[8] Specifically, the *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*, completed in 830/1427 in Shīrāz, is a synthesis of Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī/Qūnawī on the topic of absolute being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). Alternatively titled *al-Tamhīd fī sharḥ qawāʿid al-tawḥīd*, the work is in formal terms a commentary on the *Qawāʿid al-tawḥīd* of Ṣā'in al-Dīn's grandfather, the philosopher Ṣadr al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Turka; both texts have as their running theme the complementarity of philosophical and mystical modes of knowing (Zāriʿ and Karīmiyān, Tamhīd al-qawāʿid (1)). The *Tamhīd* was the subject of important studies by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (intro., *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*, Tehran 1396/1976) and Ayatollah ʿAbd Allāh Jawādī-Āmulī (*Taḥrīr-i Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*, Tehran 1372 Sh./1993), studies which both reflect the *Tamhīd*'s relatively recent adoption as a staple teaching text in Imāmi seminary curricula in Iran, probably in the late Qajar period, and perpetuate a distorted image of Ṣā'in al-Dīn as a mystical philosopher in the scholastic mode—in short, a mere precursor to the philosophical school of Isfahan. The *Tamhīd* limits itself to addressing the "doubts of the peripatetics" and illuminationists, relying primarily on the Ibn ʿArabī school tradition as formulated by Qūnawī and Jandī; it is bare of any reference to the

him in this respect with Fārābī and Suhrawardī,[9] while Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh characterizes him as the 'Spinoza of Iran.'[10] By effectively obscuring the *occultist* tenor of his larger project, however, such acclaim abstracts it from its historical context and robs it of its animating virtue. No mere scholastic, Ṣā'in al-Dīn champions lettrism throughout his oeuvre as queen of the sciences and key to deciphering the twin Books, the Qur'ān and the cosmos.

That he did so precisely at the time the Ḥurūfiyya movement was gaining popular traction in Iran served to frustrate his efforts, however, and he suffered considerably at the hands of the Shahrukhid state as a result. His religious unimpeachability as chief Shāfi'ī qāḍī in Iṣfahān and Yazd notwithstanding, and despite the fact that he presented his system to the Timurid elite precisely as corrective to what he held to be the stultifying conservativism of the scholarly establishment on the one hand and the antinomian decadence of groups such as the Ḥurūfiyya on the other, Ṣā'in al-Dīn was unable to escape the taint of Ḥurūfism pinned to him by his establishment opponents. Thrice summoned to Shāhrukh's (r. 811–50/1409–47) imperial seat in Herat to stand trial for suspected heterodox views, he was able to successfully defend himself on the first two occasions, in *ca.* 825/1422 and 829/1426; however, in the wake of an attempt made on Shāhrukh's life in 830/1427 by the Ḥurūfī assassin Aḥmad-i Lur—possibly staged by the Timurid ruler himself,[11]—Ṣā'in al-Dīn was recalled to the capital and on the basis of his claimed Ḥurūfī sympathies summarily stripped of his position and property, imprisoned, tortured and exiled. (The apologies he wrote during his trial of 829/1426 and after the events of 830/1427 are remarkable documents that provide a firsthand account of the fraughtness of early Timurid intellectual and religious life.)[12] A number of

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author's more central lettrist concerns. In the introduction to his *summa* of lettrism, the *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*, Ṣā'in al-Dīn explicitly rejects the concept of absolute being as an adequate object of metaphysical inquiry (MS Majlis 10196 f. 55a, MS Esad Efendi 1731 ff. 8b–9a; I translate this introduction in Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 342–53); the *Tamhīd* must therefore be considered as being of strictly secondary importance in the context of his larger project.

[9] *Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* v, 282–4; I am indebted to Hussein Abdulsater for alerting me to this reference.

[10] Majmū'a-yi rasā'il-i Khujandī 312; specifically, he asserts Ibn Turka to be the 'Spinoza of Iran' to rhetorically underscore the necessity of publishing and studying his works. In his study of Ṣūfism in Iran, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb (*Dunbāla-yi justujū* 142) takes issue with this title as being misrepresentative of Ṣā'in al-Dīn's more mystical and lettrist concerns.

[11] Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn 9, 114–9.

[12] These are the *Nafthat al-maṣdūr* I and *Nafthat al-maṣdūr* II, together with the creedal tracts *R. I'tiqādāt* and *R. I'tiqādiyya*. There exist two brief studies of the apologies to date:

other suspect, high-profile individuals, among them the charismatic and influential Ṣūfī master Qāsim-i Anwār (d. 837/1434) and the calligrapher Maʿrūf Khaṭṭāt Baghdādī, were also expelled from Herat. This purge is best understood in the context of Shāhrukh's aggressive attempts to consolidate eastern and western Iran under his direct control, in the course of which he targeted both messianic movements such as the Ḥurūfiyya and Nūrbakhshiyya and extra-establishment intellectuals such as Ibn Turka and his circle as ungovernable threats to his tenuously centralized state; it also reflects Shāhrukh's efforts to control the religious scene in Iran under the rubric of his Sunnizing project.[13] Ṣā'in al-Dīn's career thus throws into high relief the contested dichotomies that made intellectual, political and religious life in early Timurid Iran so fraught: orthodoxy and heterodoxy, conservativism and progressivism, philosophy and mysticism, mysticism and messianism, messianism and heterodoxy, lettrism and Ḥurūfism. Given the irreparable damage the Ḥurūfīs did to his career and his lettrist project, moreover, Ṣā'in al-Dīn's feelings toward the group were understandably of bitter resentment and naked hostility.

Before proceeding further, a definition of lettrism is in order. Briefly, by lettrism I mean any type of methodology (e.g., *jafr, ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) centered on letters as keys to deciphering (and manipulating) all levels of physical, imaginal and spiritual reality; to this end the letters are held to be matrices of numerological, astrological, alchemical, magical and other correspondences.[14] Lettrist theory presupposes a perfect, eternal, revealed

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Lewisohn, Sufism and theology, and Morio, Ta'ammulī dar difāʿiyyāt. Lewisohn's well-taken insistence on taking the apologies at face value (Sufism and Theology 66, 77) aside, however, it bears emphasizing that they must be treated with caution as sources for Ṣā'in al-Dīn's own views, given the duress under which they were composed and the author's need to distance himself to the extent possible from messianic Ṣūfism in general and Ḥurūfism in particular. Thus Ṣā'in al-Dīn's comparison of himself to Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (*al-imāmayn*) and self-presentation as a standard-issue Ashʿarī thinker (see e.g. R. Iʿtiqādiyya 268) and appeals to the (pointedly non-messianic) orthodoxy of the Khʷājagānī shaykh Muḥammad Pārsā (*Nafthat al-maṣdūr* I 172, 187–8, 193), for example, are to be taken with several large grains of salt—they tally too easily with Shāhrukh's Sunnizing program and give the lie to much of the author's oeuvre. For a summary of the apologies see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 58–68.

[13] Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn 9, 114–9; *idem*, The Anatomy of an Attepted Regicide. On Shāhrukh's attempt to control doctrine as upholder of the *sharīʿa* see Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 238–43.

[14] It should be borne in mind that this science was always closely associated with other such theoretical, divinatory and practical-magical disciplines as *ʿilm al-khawāṣṣ* (dealing with the properties of divine names, Qurʾānic words, alchemical substances, etc.), *ʿilm al-asmāʾ* (dealing with the divine names), *ʿilm aḥkām al-nujūm* or *al-tanjīm* (judicial astrology), *ʿilm al-kīmiyāʾ* (alchemy), *ʿilm al-awfāq* (magic squares), *ʿilm al-ruqā* (Qurʾānic spell

Book upon which to focus its operations, the Qurʾān in the case of Islamic lettrism and the Torah in the case of Jewish or Christian kabbalah.[15] A central focus of Islamic lettrism is the Qurʾānic *muqaṭṭaʿāt*, or mysterious isolated letters that open certain suras.

Historically, the science of letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) entered Islam at its inception in the messianic-gnostic syncretism of the early *ghulāt*,[16] absorbed from late antique Hellenic gnosticism and platonism in particular, and was associated in more sedate Shīʿī circles with the *K. al-Jafr wa-l-jāmiʿa* of ʿAlī, an omniscient text recording past and future history and all knowledge of the cosmos, together with other texts specific to the House of the Prophet and passed down through the line of the Imāms;[17] continued in the mystical-symbolical meditations of Ṣūfīs from the mid-3rd/9th century, the sophisticated occult syncretism and experimentalism of the Jābir b. Ḥayyān corpus in the same century and the neoplatonizing and neopythagoreanizing encyclopedism of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ in the 4th/10th; and further matured in the radical theory of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī (d. 649/1252) and the radical praxis of Abū-l-ʿAbbās al-Būnī (d. 622/1225?)[18] and Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī (d. 799/1397), Ṣāʾin al-Dīn's own teacher and latter-day master of *jafr*.[19]

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magic), *ʿilm al-ṭalāsim* (talismans) and *ʿilm al-taʿāwīdh* or *al-tamāʾim* (amulets), *ʿilm al-faʾl* (omen interpretation, bibliomancy), and *ʿilm al-taʿbīr* (dream interpretation and incubation), among others (see e.g. Ullman, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*; Fahd, *La divination arabe*; O'Connor, Popular and Talismanic Uses of the Qurʾān, *EQ*).

[15] It bears noting here that while Islamicate lettrism and Jewish kabbalah appear to have a common origin in the 2nd–3rd/8th–9th century gnostic-syncretic Near Eastern milieu—specifically, the foundational text of the Jewish Kabbalah, the *Sefer Yetzira* or *Book of Formation*, is likely a product of the creative symbiosis of Jewish and early Islamicate occult sciences, and is thus coeval with e.g. Ismāʿīlī and Ṣūfī speculations on the subject (Wasserstrom, Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam)—, letter theories appear to have been far more mainstream, widespread and varied in the Islamicate context than in the Jewish or post-14th century Christian; and as a revealed Book the Qurʾān, of course, differs fundamentally from the Torah in fabric and content and hence generates different speculative and operative possibilities.

[16] Al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd (d. 119/737), eponym of the Mughīriyya, was the first to explicitly use letter symbolism for the purpose of 'cosmic semiotics' within a gnostic-syncretist framework, this being continued more systematically by the Khaṭṭābiyya; see Wasserstrom, The Moving Finger Writes; Daftary, The Earliest Ismāʿīlīs 217–8; Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians* 52–70.

[17] Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival* i, 4–12, 17–20.

[18] It should be noted that the bulk of the *Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā*, Būnī's (or rather pseudo-Būnī's) best-known work on letter magic and the most famous grimoire in the Islamicate world, appears to have been produced by anonymous compilers in the 11th/17th century (see Gardiner, Forbidden Knowledge?).

[19] The massively condensed overview of the development of Islamicate lettrism offered here should not be understood in a linear sense, though a broad 'philosophizing' tendency

The 8th–10th/14th–16th centuries witnessed a burgeoning of messianic Ṣūfī groups in Iran, some of whom retrieved the gnostic-messianic elements of letter symbolism; this phenomenon is typified by the Ḥurūfiyya, whose founder, Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, was received as proclaiming a new, 'post-Islamic' dispensation centering on himself as messiah and on Persian as the new language of revelation.[20] It must, however, be emphasized that such popular expressions did little to dampen interest in the science of letters among the scholarly elite. Lettrist thought in its Islamicate context thus represents a broad cultural current hosting messiahs and mystics, Imāms and intellectuals, and comprehends in its various iterations everything from metaphysics, cosmogony and physics to alchemy, astrology and magic.

The multifariousness and multivalency of Islamicate lettrism aside, I posit for analytical convenience three overarching but frequently interpenetrating strands: gnostic-messianic, Ṣūfī, and intellectual. While what I blandly term 'intellectual lettrism' was birthed of Shīʿī gnostic-messianic and Ṣūfī strains in equal measure and never fully disavowed its parentage, the progressive neoplatonization and neopythagoreanization first of gnostic-messianic Shīʿism and then of its heir, Ṣūfism, from the 2nd/8th to the 6th/12th centuries served to naturalize both letter theory and letter magic as legitimate intellectual pursuits; at the end of this process, lettrism had attained the status of a universal science, and as such was attractive to ambitious, universalist thinkers throughout the late medieval and early modern Islamicate world—Ibn Turka prominently among them.

By contrast, Ḥurūfism represents a revival of earlier forms of gnostic-syncretist letter speculation. Faḍl Allāh's central innovation was the displacement of Arabic by Persian as the language of the new cycle of divinity, inaugurated by his own emergence as messiah in 788/1386; this held to such an extent that the Qurʾān could now be read as if written in Persian.[21] Now Ibn Turka is a profoundly millenarian thinker by any

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is evident. For a survey of the development of the various strands of lettrist thought from the 2nd–11th/8th–17th centuries see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 167–283; Lory, *La Science des Lettres*; Gril, The Science of Letters.

[20] It should be noted that the more extreme aspects of Ḥurūfī doctrine do not appear to have been propounded by Faḍl Allāh himself but by his disciples after his death, animated as they were by the fervent expectation of the second coming of their leader; the founding document of Ḥurūfism, Faḍl Allāh's *Jāwidān-nāma*, while certainly extremist (and extremely confusing) in some respects, itself remains largely within the ambit of late 8th/14th century Ṣūfism (Mir-Kasimov, Jāvdān-nāma, *EIr*).

[21] Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi* 25–9, 70.

standard, to be sure; but his proclamation of the advent of a new age, heralded by heavenly portent, in which the occult knowledge of the Imāms and the ancients will be made manifest[22] is unimpeachably orthodox in its insistence on the binding finality of the dispensation given through Muḥammad, the uncreated nature of the Qur'ān and the privileged status of Arabic. Space does not permit a discussion of Ḥurūfī doctrine here, a topic treated incisively elsewhere by several of the scholars included in the present volume.[23] My focus, rather, will be solely on Ṣā'in al-Dīn's promulgation of intellectual lettrism as the driving concern of his life's work, and in particular his unprecedented dissociation of lettrism from Ṣūfism and elevation of lettrism above both philosophy and mystical theory in his epistemological hierarchy as supreme science.

Ibn Turka's Popularization of Lettrism as Universal Science

Ṣā'in al-Dīn devoted three treatises, all in Persian, to establishing the nature, scope and objectives of lettrism as such. Significantly, two of these were written for the benefit of members of the Timurid ruling elite. (I here leave aside a number of other works that constitute exercises in applied lettrism.)[24] These treatises may be briefly characterized as follows:

1. *R. Ḥurūf*, possibly commissioned by Iskandar Mīrzā (r. 812–17/1409–14) and completed in 817/1414 in Shīrāz, an introductory treatment of the premises and principles of lettrism. The introduction touches on the meaning of the letter as such, followed by three sections devoted to

[22] This particularly in his *R. Shaqq-i qamar u bayān-i sā'at*; see below.

[23] See the bibliography for select studies by S. Bashir, O. Mir-Kasimov and A. Amanat in particular.

[24] Applied lettrist treatises that are beyond the scope of the present discussion include *R. al-Inzāliyya*, on the revelation of the heavenly Books as treated successively from exoteric, mystical, and finally lettrist perspectives; *R. al-Bā'iyya*, a short treatise in the lettrist manner in answer to a postulant's question as to why the *bā'* is foremost among the letters in terms of its invariably sura-initial occurrence in the Qur'ān; *R. al-Muḥammadiyya*, on the properties of the name Muḥammad; *R. Asrār al-ṣalāt*, on the symbolism and esoteric meaning of the prayer act; *R. Nuqṭa*, a commentary on 'Alī's statement, *Anā l-nuqṭa allatī taḥta l-bā'*; *R. dar Ma'nā-yi khawāṣṣ-i 'ilm-i ṣarf*, on various aspects of morphology dealt with in a lettrist manner; *Sharḥ al-basmala*, a commentary on the *basmala* in a lettrist manner; and a number of other treatises featuring specifically lettrist components. Mention should also be made of Ṣā'in al-Dīn's magisterial commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabī, which, distinctively among the host of commentaries on this text, is thickly veined with lettrist excursuses.

each of the three aspects of the letter respectively: written-textual (*raqamī kitābī*), associated with sight; spoken-oral (*lafẓī kalāmī*), associated with hearing; and spiritual-mental (*maʿnawī lubābī*), i.e., numerical, associated with the heart. The treatise closes with an examination of the Doubled Seven (*sabʿ al-mathānī*) as a test case.[25]

2. *R. Anjām*, aka *R. dar Tamyīz-i ʿilm-i ḥurūf az taṣawwuf* or *Taṣawwuf u ḥurūf*, written in or before 828/1425, a comparison of Ṣūfism and lettrism. Ṣūfism is first juxtaposed with philosophy, both involving the quest for wisdom (*ḥikmat*) and as such constituting noble sciences within their own ambit; but neither can compete with lettrism, which is presented as the supreme science of the age. The treatise is stated to be written in the most accessible manner possible in the interest of promoting the science more widely.[26]
3. *R. Suʾl al-mulūk*, written in or before 829/1426 at the request of Bāysunghur b. Shāhrukh, an introductory work treating of both the practical (i.e., alchemical and talismanic) and the theoretical aspects of lettrism. It is likewise written in a highly accessible manner, and offers a broader overview of the science than is given in the two preceding treatises, neither of which are concerned with practical-magical applications.[27]

Ṣāʾin al-Dīn's most succinct statement as to the objective of lettrism occurs in the *R. Anjām*, where he presents the science as the key to the unification of all human knowledge of the cosmos. Where philosophy deals only with universals and the more concrete disciplines such as historiography, astronomy or alchemy are enmeshed in particulars, the objective of lettrism is "investigation into everything in the cosmos, both universals and particulars, and their categorization (*tarattub*) by means of this science."[28] Here, of course, Ṣāʾin al-Dīn is most notably taking issue with the Avicennan concept of metaphysics as the 'universal science' (*al-ʿilm al-kullī*) dealing with all existents.[29] Based on inductive reasoning (*adilla-*

[25] For an edition and translation of this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 463–89.

[26] For an edition and translation of this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 490–506.

[27] For an edition of this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 507–27.

[28] *R. Anjām*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 159a.

[29] The term *al-ʿilm al-kullī* properly refers to ontology in both peripatetic and illuminationist philosophy, which, together with *al-ʿilm al-rubūbī* or *al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, i.e. theology, constitutes metaphysics. Heidrun Eichner has recently discussed the various later

yi naẓarī) alone, metaphysics is confined to the abstract and therefore cannot truly claim to be universal. As he states more fully in the same treatise:

> It is clear to the inhabitants of the alley of attentiveness and perspicacity that any science which can clearly formulate knowledge of all things, both universals and particulars, and whose principles and questions clarify the nature of every level of divine and engendered existence, from that of engendered beings (*akwān*) up to that of the [fixed] entities (*aʿyān*), such that the ornament of proof (*burhān*) shines forth brilliantly from the folds of its expositions (as may be demonstrated to those seekers (*ṭālibān*) whose degree of perception and purpose is but slightly less than that of the Heirs of the Prophetic legacy (*wārithān-i khatmī*) and who are acquainted with his devoted servants (*khāksārān-i kūy-i khidmat-ash*))—such a science surpasses all others in value.
>
> My heart said, I long for mystical knowledge!
> Teach me if you're able.
> I replied, *A*. It said, Yes, and? I said, That's it:
> if anyone's home a single letter will suffice.[30]

Ṣā'in al-Dīn thus counterpoints lettrism in its true universality with philosophy and Ṣūfism. While both must be considered inferior to lettrism, however, they are necessary and noble disciplines in their own right:

> The science of Ṣūfism may thus be seen as constituting a mode of wisdom that is formulated in terms of Muḥammad's Sunna and the prescriptions (*sharāyiʿ*) of his revelation, and has its place among the permitted sciences and required practices. Mainstream philosophy constitutes a [complementary] science that is formulated in terms of inductive proofs and rational demonstrations (*adilla-yi naẓarī u barāhīn-i ʿaqlī*), and likewise has its place among the permitted sciences and required practices. Consider the difference in their methods and compare the point of departure and end result of each.
>
> The Chosen One is in this cosmos where one imagines Intellect to be,
> a sun in that sphere where one strains to see Suhā.[31]
>
> The objective of the science of Ṣūfism is likewise clear to the perspicacious: its program of education and training aims to elevate a person beyond the level of mere animal physicality (*ḥayawānīyyat*) and accidental being (*ḥayāt-i ʿāriḍī*) by means of the proven methods and practices contained in

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philosophical uses of the term (The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition; see e.g. the chart on p. 87).

[30] *R. Anjām*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 158b.

[31] I.e., the faint star Alcor in Ursa Major; finding it in the night sky was regarded by the Arabs as a test of sight. The verse is by Sanā'ī.

> the prophetic teachings so as to attain to the level of human perfection and eternal life, thereby escaping entrapment in the darkness of the flesh where one is cut off from the fount of the water of life.
>
> That spring from which Khiḍr drank the water of life
> is in your own home, but you've blocked it off![32]

In his *R. Ḥurūf* Ṣā'in al-Dīn is concerned to further situate his brand of lettrism among the sciences by contrasting it with the far more common practical-magical approach exemplified by Būnī. While he fully accepts the validity of lettrism as an occult praxis (his master, Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī, was renowned as a *magus*), Ṣā'in al-Dīn prefers to emphasize the neglected yet more important function of lettrism as the basis for a broader occult philosophy:[33]

> Given that the science of letters is a universal science (*az ʿulūm-i kulliyya*) comprising numerous other sciences under its aegis, each of them important and worthy of purpose in its own right, the practitioners of this science naturally fall into various camps. Generally speaking, however, they may be divided into two overarching groups.
>
> The first and best-known group consists of those who are concerned with the occult properties of the letters (*ahl-i khawāṣṣ*). These investigate the occult properties of each letter according to each of its three forms, and hold that the utterance or contemplation of a letter in accordance with a specific description (*waṣfī muʿayyan*) and its associated conditions activates its particular property either with respect to the levels of the physical world (*marātib-i dunyawī*) or to spiritual interactions at various levels (*muʿāmalāt-i ukhrawī wa madārij-i ān*). The exponents of this first approach, including most prominently Abū-l-ʿAbbās al-Būnī, have composed innumerable books and treatises on the subject, and make up the majority of those concerned with the science of letters.
>
> The second group consists of those who are concerned with the letters' underlying realities (*ahl-i ḥaqāyiq*). These investigate into the meanings (*maʿānī*) behind the letters and the universal sciences (*ʿulūm-i kullī*) they contain, and understand all types of knowledge and modes of knowing, whether with respect to the divine presences (*ḥaḍarāt-i ilāhiyya*) or the contingent realms (*ʿawālim-i imkāniyya*) and all that comes to be in them, in terms of the heavenly Book (*kitāb-i āsmānī*) and the isolated Qur'ānic

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[32] *R. Anjām*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 158a.

[33] Cf. Wouter Hanegraaff's discussion of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's (d. 1535) innovative interpretation of the nonmagical *Corpus Hermeticum* in his seminal *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (1510), which resulted "in a new perspective on how the attainment of a superior gnosis implies the acquisition of suprahuman powers. Moreover, the new perspective was not seen as magical either, but as something much 'better than magic' " (Better than Magic 2–3).

> letters (*ḥurūf-i muqaṭṭaʿa-yi Qurʾānī*). They likewise apprehend the occult properties of everything that has ever manifested or will ever manifest in the universe, each communicating this according to the vigor and capacity of his understanding. My purpose in this treatise is to present a few of the guiding principles (*uṣūl*) of this latter group, this in order to familiarize seekers with this science and equip them to pursue it to perfection—God grant us all success to this end.[34]

Finally, in the *R. Suʾl al-mulūk* Ṣāʾin al-Dīn capitalizes on the contemporary popularity of applied lettrism to draw attention to its theoretical component. He demonstrates, by way of example, the interdependency of both modes in medical terms:[35]

> Now among the Qurʾānic prooftexts for this function of the letters according to both of the above divisions [i.e., the practical and the theoretical] is the following: *And We send down of the Qurʾān that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers* (Q 17:82). According to the plain meaning of this verse, it is abundantly clear that what is revealed in the Qurʾān contains within it two great benefits, both of which constitute props to the foundation of human perfection and without whose preparatory assistance (*tamhīd*) the meaning of perfection can never be realized.
>
> The first of these two benefits is bodily healing (*shifā-yi badan*); that is to say, these Qurʾānic letters, issuing as they do from the pharmacy (*sharbatkhāna*) of divine subtleties, serve to restore the body's native power and natural balance in the event its constitution (*mizāj*)—which in its mature and healthy state figures as one's vehicle on this path—loses that balance, and its bodily or spiritual form ceases to function properly, becoming incapable of bearing any burdens or traveling the path.
>
> My beloved is Jesus-breathed—kill me in her presence
> and then behold what her breath does![36]
>
> Thus the special properties contained in every potion, medicine and electuary are in fact contained to a greater degree within these Qurʾānic letters, these uncreated heavenly substances. If anyone harbors a reservation on this point, he should know that it is on account of a deficiency in his belief in the Qurʾān and a failure to ascend the rungs of faith . . .

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[34] *R. Ḥurūf*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 154b.

[35] Cf. Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb's (d. 718/1318) *R. Ḥurūf*, which compares the letters to individual medicinal substances; in isolation each has a property (*ḥukm*) and particularity (*khāṣṣiyyat*) peculiar to it alone, but when combined with other medicinal substances it acquires new medical properties—so too with the Qurʾānic letters (R. al-Ḥurūf 278; for more on this treatise as an instance of intellectual lettrism see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 219–23).

[36] Awḥadī, ghazal: *ṣabrī kunīm tā sitam-i ū chi mī-kunad*.

> The second of these two props of perfection as revealed through the Qur'ānic letters applies when the body requires no medical treatment, being in full possession of its natural balance and its external and internal faculties; at this point the effusion of divine mercy (*raḥmat-i raḥmānī*) fills the cups of one's bodily instruments (*asbāb u ālāt-i jismānī*) to the brim with its flow of virtues (*afḍāl*), such that one is enabled to climb out of the chasms of satanically-inspired incapacity and failure on the ascending rungs of existence and thereby arrive at human perfection. This activates one's preparedness (*istiʿdād*) to receive from the hand of the cupbearer of divine mercy the choicest wine of theoretical inquiry and divine knowledge in the receptacles of the eternal letters and the pots of the primordial molds (*awḍāʿ*) and quaff therefrom. Through persistence in drinking from these cups one may arrest one's descent into alienation (*buʿd*) and the deserts of estrangement and ascend to nearness [with God] (*qurb*) and the sanctuary of union (*jamʿiyyat*).[37]

As we have seen, then, Ṣā'in al-Dīn considers his lettrism, supreme among the universal sciences, to be superior to both philosophy and Ṣūfism, and presents it as constituting simultaneously an occult praxis and an occult philosophy, placing emphasis on the latter aspect as corrective. While he does not consider himself the first to have arrived at such an understanding—he consistently defers to his teacher Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī and acknowledges Ibn ʿArabī and Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī as two of his main textual sources[38]—, he is elsewhere explicit that the approach to lettrism that he is promoting is unique to his generation and exemplifies the upward evolution of human knowledge.

Ibn Turka's Intellectual Hierarchy

We have seen above the clear centrality of lettrism to Ṣā'in al-Dīn's project; it is somewhat puzzling, then, that in his famous intellectual hierarchy Ṣā'in al-Dīn does not seem to award lettrism the highest rank. In his *R. Shaqq-i qamar u bayān-i sāʿat*, a short commentary on Q 54:1 (*The Hour has drawn nigh: the moon is split*) written at the beginning of 829/1426,[39] Ṣā'in al-Dīn presents us with a seven-tiered intellectual hierarchy that may be considered the key to his thought.[40] Here the verse is subjected

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[37] *R. Suʾl al-mulūk*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 172b.

[38] See e.g. *K. al-mafāḥiṣ*, MS Majlis f. 53a.

[39] I.e., the same year of his second trial in Herat and composition of his first, hyper-Sunnī apology, the *Nafthat al-maṣdūr* I (together with *R. Iʿtiqādāt*).

[40] For a translation of this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 454–62.

to seven different interpretations representative of the increasing sophistication of their associated groups:

1) The first and lowest level is represented by the jurists and traditionists, who know nothing beyond the literalness of outward form (*ahl-i ẓāhir*);
2) the next level in ascending order is represented by the dialectical theologians (*mutakallimān*), also partisans of the outward form but ones who have progressed beyond mere literalness through their use of reason;
3) third are the peripatetic philosophers, also called 'latter-day philosophers' or sages of the exoteric (*ḥukamā-yi ẓāhir u muta'akhkhirān*);
4) fourth are the illuminationist philosophers, previously called the ancient school of philosophy (*ḥukamā-yi qadīm*);[41]
5) fifth are 'verifying' or theoretically penetrating mystics (*muḥaqqiqān-i ṣūfiyya*), advocates of the direct, intuitive experience of reality (*ahl-i shuhūd*);[42]
6) sixth are the lettrists (*ramz-kh^{w}ānān-i ḥurūf-i Qur'ānī, arbāb-i 'ilm-i ḥurūf*);
7) and seventh and highest is 'Alī and the line of the Imāms after him, the sole mediators of the Prophetic legacy.[43]

All well and good—lettrists such as Ṣā'in al-Dīn therefore preside over the rest of the hierarchy from their vantage point at level six, but cannot attain to the seventh and highest level, which, in a gesture of deference, is reserved for the Imāms. The hierarchy thus seems straightforward and unremarkable apart from its Shī'ī and lettrist slant, simply being a schema that indicates the relative importance Ṣā'in al-Dīn assigns to the six religious-intellectual currents of his day from the perspective of his own project.

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[41] As Corbin notes, Ṣā'in al-Dīn's discussion of the illuminationists is quoted verbatim in the *Dabistān-i madhāhib*, an important Ādhar Kaywānī pseudo-Zoroastrian text written between 1055–68/1645–58 in India (Typologie 261 n. 83; see Mojtabā'ī, Dabestān-e maḏāheb, *EIr*). This is evidence for Ṣā'in al-Dīn's assertion, translated above, that his writings are much in demand in India, among other places (Nafthat al-maṣdūr II 209–10).

[42] These 'verifying Ṣūfīs' are especially to be identified with the school of Ibn 'Arabī.

[43] Cf. the three-tiered hierarchy Ṣā'in al-Dīn gives in his *Sharḥ-i naẓm al-durr*, including in ascending order philosophers, Ṣūfīs and lettrists—none of whom require the medium of poetry to access supernal truths (*Sharḥ-i naẓm al-durr* 5–6).

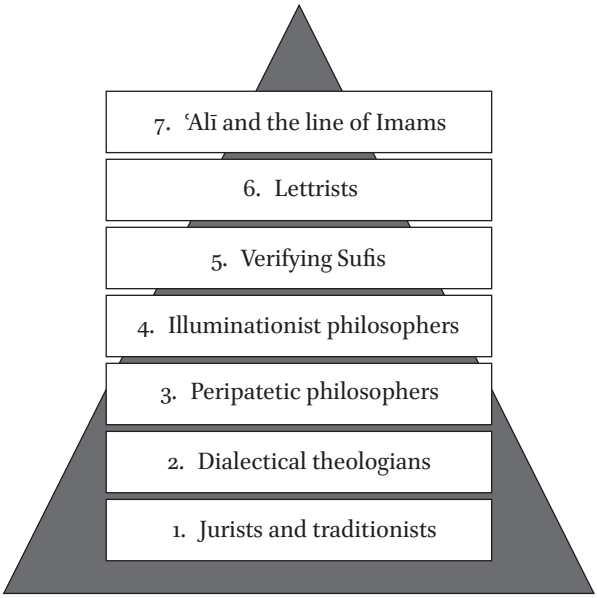

Fig. 1. Ibn Turka's intellectual hierarchy in the *R. Shaqq-i qamar*

A closer examination of the text, however, suggests that the seventh level is not entirely what it seems. After referring to the Imāms, here called *ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār*, 'men of might and vision,' in reference to Q 38:45,[44] he says: *ẓuhūr-i īn ṭawr makhṣūṣ-i hamīn zamān-i saʿādat-qirān ast*, that is, the manifestation of this supreme level of knowledge is peculiar to the present time, inaugurated by a significant celestial conjunction,[45] a fact which has been communicated to him by his teacher Sayyid Ḥusayn

[44] *Remember also Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—men of might and vision.*

[45] I am not entirely sure which conjunction Ṣāʾin al-Dīn has in mind, but the Saturn-Jupiter conjunction in Scorpio in October 767/1365 appears to be the most significant astrological event of the 8th/14th century in the Islamic context; a similar Saturn-Jupiter conjunction in Scorpio in April 571 CE had long been associated with the advent of Muḥammad, so its reappearance in 767/1365 suggested the beginning of a period of great change in the Muslim world (see Balkhī (Abū Maʿshar), *On the Great Conjunctions* i, 127, 152–3; cf. Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa'* 45–7). In particular, the year 1365 marked a change of element from air to water (the *trigonalis* or medium conjunction), i.e., it was the first year that Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions began recurring in the water signs, then from 828/1425 to 991/1583, and finally in 1053/1643. Conjunctions in a water element were associated with periods of spiritual, cultural, economic or political flourishing; the period 1365–1643, taken as a piece, was indeed witness to a proliferation of millenarian and universalist energies throughout the Islamicate world, while also bracketing, for example, the European Renaissance.

Akhlāṭī (*sayyid-i mā*).[46] He continues by referring to previous attempts to plumb the esoteric heritage of the Imāms encompassing total knowledge of past, present and future, which, however, remains the sole preserve of the Pillars of the Prophetic House (*asāṭīn-i ahl-i bayt*), i.e., ʿAlī and his august sons (*amīr u awlād-i amjād-ash*) who have left to us the technique of *jafr*.[47]

It will immediately be noted, of course, that in identifying his supreme level seven with the divinatory science of *jafr* Ṣāʾin al-Dīn effectively awards the highest epistemological status to lettrism: the same lettrism of level six, that is, but taken to its occult extreme and reserved for the elite of the elite. More importantly, what Ṣāʾin al-Dīn seems to be suggesting here is that comprehensive occult knowledge is simply *latent* in the Imāms and has only begun to be *actualized* by the author and his circle—a rather more daring thesis and, needless to say, one profoundly millenarian in tone. As such, it further implies a doctrine of progress. Yet this presents us with a paradox: how can latter-day knowledge be simultaneously superior to that of the Imāms yet wholly subsidiary to it? To negotiate this impasse we must look elsewhere for clues as to the precise identity of the seventh and highest group, these *men of might and vision*.

Significantly, in the alternate seven-tiered hierarchy he gives in his *R. Madārij afhām al-afwāj*, Ṣāʾin al-Dīn is more explicit about the identity of the members of the seventh level: it consists of "the members of the House of the Prophet (*maḥramān-i ḥaramsarāy-i khatmī*) and those who can riddle their cryptic utterances from among the perfected saints of Islam, and the sages of antiquity (*ḥukamā-yi qadīm*), disciples of the prophets of God."[48] As an example of the second category, in the *R. Anjām*

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[46] As a mark of his great respect, Ṣāʾin al-Dīn only mentions Akhlāṭī as *sayyid* or with references to his ʿAlid status, never by name or honorific; given his imamophilism, Ṣāʾin al-Dīn's veneration for his teacher was due not least to the latter's blood connection to the Imāms. For example, speaking of his time as Akhlāṭī's disciple in Cairo with Yazdī, he says: "In due course the subtleties of divine favor were vouchsafed me on a journey [to Cairo] in the company of a group [of friends], the dearest [to me] among them being my brother in God Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Yazdī, there to meet that garrison (*miṣr*) of sanctified power (*walāya/wilāya*) and guidance, the sublime Sayyidic Threshold (*al-sudda al-saniyya al-sayyidiyya*) (God's peace be upon him and his noble forebears). [Under his tutelage] I came under the sway of such a measure of blessing (*niʿma*) as has never before been granted to teacher or taught" (*K. al-mafāḥiṣ*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 52b).

[47] R. Shaqq-i qamar 111–12, 116.

[48] R. Madārij afhām al-afwāj 89. In full, the alternate hierarchy Ṣāʾin al-Dīn presents in his *R. Madārij afhām al-afwāj fi tafsīr āyat thamāniyat azwāj*, a relatively detailed commentary on Q 6:143–4 (*Eight couples: two of sheep, two of goats, . . . two of camels, two of oxen*), is arranged according to the views of seven groups on these two verses in ascending order:

he cites Anaxagoras, Pythagoras and Socrates as disciples of Solomon and his companions.[49]

This list, moreover, may be expanded at will. In a short work on defending against the plague, for example, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī of Antioch (d. 858/1454), Ṣāʾin al-Dīn's counterpart in Anatolia, explicitly defines these same *ūlū l-aydī wa-l-abṣār*, "those who have plucked from the niche of the realm of lights the secret truths," as including in the first place Hermes Trismegistus (*Hirmis al-Harāmisa*) and Luqmān, and secondarily a number of other ancient authorities such as Apollonius of Tyana (*Bālīnās*), Solomon's vizier Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, Euclid (*Iqlīdūs*), Aristophanes (*Arisṭāfānūs*), Eudemus of Rhodes (*Hūdimīs*), etc., who may be presumed to have acquired their knowledge from contemporary prophets.[50] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān expands considerably on this list in his *K. al-Durra al-nāsiʿa*, which includes ancient prophets such as Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Hermes and Zarathustra; various Babylonian, Egyptian and Indian sages; and Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes and Ptolemy.[51]

Finally, Ṣāʾin al-Dīn removes all doubt on the matter in his *R. al-Inzāliyya*, where he states that it is specifically lettrists (*ahl al-ḥarf*) who must be considered the associates of the Prophet Muḥammad and his true heirs

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exoteric exegetes, Ṣūfīs of outward practice, philosophers, the verifiers (*muḥaqqiqān*) among the Ṣūfīs, the Ṣūfī elite (*ẓurafāʾ*), those who can understand the language of the prophets and interpret the forms of the revelations they have brought (*wāqifān-i zabān-i hidāyat-bayān-i anbiyā-yi mursal u kāshifān-i ṣuwar-i munzala-yi ilāhī u ʿulūm-i sharḥī u ṣadrī*), and finally the members of the House of the Prophet and those who can riddle their cryptic utterances from among the saints of Islam, and the sages of antiquity, disciples of the prophets of God (*maḥramān-i ḥaramsarāy-i khatmī u wāqifān-i zabān-i muʿammā-nishān-i īshān az kummal-i awliyā-yi Muḥammadī wa ḥukamā-yi qadīm ki talāmidha-yi anbiyā-yi Allāh-and*). It differs from that in the *R. Shaqq-i qamar* in its collapsing theologians and peripatetic and illuminationist philosophers into a single category, and giving fully three categories to various classes of Ṣūfīs. Ṣāʾin al-Dīn also devoted a separate treatise, the *R. Aṭwār-i thalātha*, to the analysis of an alternate three-tiered Ṣūfī hierarchy: *muḥaqqiqān, abrār* and *akhyār*.

[49] *R. Anjām*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 157b. Similar assertions are seen in the *Mafāḥiṣ*, e.g. in a discussion of the division of the number one into the two complementary concepts of *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya* where the ancients (not named) are collectively styled the disciples of Solomon: *al-ṣadru l-awwalu mina l-ḥukamāʾi wa-humu lladhīna qtabasū anwāra l-ḥikmati l-ḥaqqati min mishkāti l-nubuwwati l-Sulaymāniyya* (MS Majlis 10196 f. 57b, MS Esad Efendi 1731 f. 17a). See also section 2.8 of the same work (MS Majlis 10196 f. 77b) for more on the theme of the ancient sages as disciples of the prophets.

[50] *Waṣf al-dawāʾ* 16. The list includes other names I was unable to identify: Isqīlūnūs, servant of Idrīs/Enoch; Lādan (Phaedon?); Ṭafiṭūhīsh; Hirdūrīs (Herodotus?); and Darhāyūsh (Darius?). Aristotle, Plato and Galen are also mentioned as having cured or helped to cure the plague.

[51] MS Hafid Efendi 461 ff. 254b–6a.

(*aṣḥāb al-khātam wa-warathatu-hu*); it is they who understand the meanings of the letters according to their three forms, numerological, symbological and phonological.[52] Indeed, as Ṣā'in al-Dīn's *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ* is devoted to systematically explicating each of these three forms of the letters, by this definition it may be considered a manual for attaining to an Imām-like status.[53]

The seventh and highest level described in the *R. Shaqq-i qamar*, then, should be understood as referring both to the Imāms and to ancient prophets such as Hermes Trismegistus—as well as to "those who can riddle their cryptic utterances": the ancient philosophers, on the one hand, and Ṣā'in al-Dīn and his lettrist colleagues on the other, who thus stand equal to such giants as Pythagoras, Socrates and Euclid. More—it is their destiny, as heralded by a recent celestial conjunction, to actualize the occult prophetic legacy from their privileged position at the beginning of the 9th Islamic century.

Lettrism as a New Metaphysics

Invidious comparisons of lettrism and philosophy constitute a running theme in Ṣā'in al-Dīn's works. Unsurprisingly, this theme is particularly developed in Ṣā'in al-Dīn *summa* of lettrism, the *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ* or *Book of Inquiries*. His argument there in brief: the faux-universal concepts of philosophical speculation notwithstanding, only the letter encompasses all that is and is not, all that can and cannot be; it alone is the *coincidentia oppositorum*; hence lettrism is the only truly universal science. By extension: lettrism is the only metaphysics worth the name.

The *Mafāḥiṣ* is the cornerstone of Ṣā'in al-Dīn's oeuvre and the key to his universalist project.[54] More, as the definitive systematization of the

[52] R. al-Inzāliyya 144.

[53] More specifically, in the *Mafāḥiṣ* (section 3.7) Ṣā'in al-Dīn notes that the spoken form of the letters pertains to prophethood, given its mission to benefit the masses, while the other two forms, the written and mental, are peculiar to *walāya/wilāya*: the first to the elite members of this category, and the second to the Seal of Sanctified Power (i.e., ʿAlī), his family and his heirs (*li-khātami-hā wa-ahli-hi wa-warathati-hi*). This is shown by the fact that the Prophet dwelt almost exclusively on the spoken form of revelation and did not refer to its mental or written forms except allusively (MS Majlis 10196 f. 85a, MS Esad Efendi 1731 f. 83b).

[54] This may be seen from the fact that Ṣā'in al-Dīn refers the reader to the *Mafāḥiṣ* in many of his other works, while also referring the reader to his other works in the *Mafāḥiṣ*. The earliest copy of this work, MS Majlis 10196, features autograph sections at the beginning, middle and end of the copy. The same copy contains marginal notes referring the

lettrist teachings of Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī,[55] it is perhaps the single most important work for understanding the thought and self-positioning of his intellectual network in the early 9th/15th century, both in Timurid Iran and Ottoman Anatolia. (Significantly, this network of prominent esotericists styled itself the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' in reference to the shadowy 4th/10th century group of neoplatonist-neopythagorean thinkers of the same name.)[56] The *Mafāḥiṣ* treats of the meanings of the letters according to their three forms, numerological (*iḥsā'ī*), symbological (*kitābī*) and phonological (*kalāmī*); a fourth section deals more generally with the letters as such (*fī anfusi-hā*) in the context of language and literature. The author states that his primary purpose in this work is to demonstrate the roots of all manifestation in the One and schematize the mechanics of multiplicity's derivation therefrom. This information, in turn, will allow the adept to manipulate the letters—the uncreated, creative matrices through which the One self-manifests—to access and control every epistemological and ontological level of the cosmos, thus constituting a continuum from rarefied letter theory to purely practical letter magic. The supreme dignity of its object necessarily renders lettrism the supreme science:

> The object of the science we have here in view is the One (*al-wāḥid*) insofar as it is one, regardless of the form in which it manifests in all the variety of its significations. The all-pervasive, all-encompassing nature of One with respect to existence being obvious, this science is therefore necessarily superior to all other sciences by an order of magnitude.[57]

Ṣā'in al-Dīn elsewhere contrasts the object of lettrism with the philosophical concept of absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), the focus of his *Tamhīd al-qawā'id*; because this concept is only relevant to things that

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reader to the author's *Sharḥ al-basmala* (f. 84a) and his unfinished *K. al-Iṣbāḥ* (f. 89a) respectively for more detail on certain points; the author states his hope to expound more fully on the esoteric aspects of a verse in section 3.7 (f. 85a). The main text also refers the reader to the author's *Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (f. 75a), *R. al-Muḥammadiyya* (f. 76a) and *R. Asrār al-ṣalāt* (f. 77a). Ṣā'in al-Dīn refers to the *Mafāḥiṣ* in his *Iṣbāḥ al-anwār* (MS Majlis 10196 f. 407b) and *R. Nuqṭa* (ed. 'A. Farrukh, 184, 190).

55 Cf. the letter sent by Sayyid Ḥusayn to Ṣā'in al-Dīn urging his accomplished disciple to write a work establishing the propositions (*muqaddamāt*) and associations or conjuctions (*iqtirānāt*) proper to the science of letters; the *Mafāḥiṣ* thus represents Ṣā'in al-Dīn's answer to this call (see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 146; the letter is transcribed in *ibid.* 568–9).

56 On the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' network see Fazlıoğlu, İlk dönem Osmanlı ilim; Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom; Gril, Ésotérisme contre hérésie; Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn 79–82, 99–106; Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 16–9.

57 MS Majlis 10196 f. 53b.

exist, it can hardly serve as the object of a universal science. Only the letter encompasses all that is and is not, all that can and cannot be, transcending the duality inherent in intellection by uniting opposed concept pairs (*taʿānuq al-aṭrāf, taʿānuq ḍiddayn*) such as absolute existence/absolute nonexistence.[58] It must be noted that Ṣāʾin al-Dīn is here updating the Ibn ʿArabian concept of the creative imagination (*khayāl*) as primary, all-encompassing faculty, making explicit what the Andalusian master left relatively implicit by privileging the role of the letters with respect to the creative imagination's mechanics and outworkings.[59]

Moreover, the lettrist theory formulated in the *Mafāḥiṣ* deliberately breaks with earlier treatments of the subject. In his lettrist works Ṣāʾin al-Dīn often criticizes the existing literature as being "stale and timeworn"[60] and compares it to "toughened, jerked meat,"[61] this fact justifying his failure to cite previous authorities; indeed, he asserts that lettrism had long been in decline before Akhlāṭī appeared on the scene to revive it:

> Knowledge of this noble science having been all but erased a long time since, it has happily been and is currently being revived in our own day through the blessed efforts of the disciples of the Sayyidic Presence (*ḥaḍrat-i sayyidī*)—God's peace be upon him and his noble fathers![62]

Ṣāʾin al-Dīn therefore enjoins his readers:

> [To benefit from this book] seekers must first rid themselves of all standard preconceptions that have been well cooked by the flames of their yearning in the pots of conjecture and seasoned with the soporific condiments of imitation of those who have gone before.[63]

In particular, he ignores lettrist precedent by promoting the written (*kitābī*) form of the letters over the oral (*kalāmī*), which had long been awarded epistemological precedence in the tradition due to its association with

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[58] See e.g. MS Majlis 10196 ff. 55a, 58b.

[59] That is to say, letters, as the most fundamental of images, represent the atoms of the imaginal realm (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) (personal communication with Prof. William Chittick; see also Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*). On the similar importance of the creative imagination to thinkers in late medieval and early modern south India, for example, see Shulman, *More than Real*.

[60] *R. Ḥurūf*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 157a; for an edition and translation of this treatise see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 463–89.

[61] *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 52a.

[62] *R. Ḥurūf*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 156b.

[63] *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 53a.

prophetic revelation.[64] For Ṣā'in al-Dīn, however, it is the written form that is uniquely associated with the *men of might and vision*—whom, we have seen, he identifies with the Imāms and the ancients, as well as the members of his own circle—, for it is they alone who bring to actualization what is contained *in potentia* in the prophetic revelation as delivered orally. (This power of actualization is denoted by the polysemous term pair *walāya/wilāya*, which may be inadequately rendered as 'sanctified power,' and centers on the concept of the Perfect, Prophetic Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as vicegerent (*khalīfa*) over creation and transcript (*nuskha*) of the macrocosm.)[65] The emphasis here is thus on the unbroken *textual* tradition reaching back through the mists of time and preserving true, occult knowledge of history and the cosmos.[66] Ṣā'in al-Dīn's unprecedented lionization of the letters' written form is, in effect, a quintessential expression of his millenarian consciousness, his convinction that he was witness to a new phase of human evolution made possible to his generation through its ability to encompass all of the accumulated knowledge of the elite of humanity in all ages, whether that knowledge be prophetic or philosophical, mystical or magical, theoretical or applied, particular or universal.

Ṣā'in al-Dīn's dismissal, out of hand, of the intervening lettrist tradition aside, he identifies its previous high-water mark with the lettrist writings of Ibn ʿArabī and Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī in the 7th/13th century. Indeed, the only textual sources he admits into this, his magisterial systematization of Akhlāṭī's oral teachings, are Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* and Saʿd al-Dīn's *K. al-Maḥbūb*.[67] His extreme regard for these two authorities stems from his perception of them as unparelleled sources of prophetic-grade knowledge as expressed in the undammable flood of their occult outpourings; his retrieval and promotion of their lettrist thought therefore naturally constitutes an important element of his own project. That they achieved the highest rank of *walāya/wilāya* may be seen from the fact that they alone were able to answer the famous 157 questions posed by Ḥakīm Tirmidhī.[68]

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[64] *K. al-Mafāḥiṣ*, introduction to section 2, MS Majlis 10196 ff. 72b–73b; this introduction is summarized in Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 338–9.

[65] For debates on the meanings of this term pair see e.g. Landolt, Walāya, *ER* xiv, 216–22.

[66] I discuss the paradoxical tension inherent in such references to a *prisca sapientia*, and Ṣā'in al-Dīn's attempt to resolve this tension in favor of a doctrine of progress, in Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 321–9.

[67] To these sources should be added, e.g., Jābir b. Ḥayyān's *K. al-Khamsīn*, quoted briefly in section five of the introduction (MS Majlis 10196 f. 55b).

[68] Nafthat al-maṣdūr I 186.

Lettrism vs. Ḥurūfīsm

As the foremost lettrist thinker of early 9th/15th century Iran, then, what was Ṣā'in al-Dīn's view of the Ḥurūfiyya? Rather surprisingly, Ṣā'in al-Dīn does not refer to Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī and his followers by name anywhere in his lettrist works, perhaps not wishing to dignify them with such recognition, though he does allude elsewhere to the group generically and with patent hostility as one among several messianic Ṣūfī movements characterized by antinomianism and worldly ambition.[69] He confesses himself particularly incensed at such groups' lack of intellectual rigor; in the introduction to his *R. al-Bā'iyya*, for example, he gives the reason for its composition as being to combat "the teachings of certain Ṣūfis (*mutaṣawwifa*) on the subject that are detestable to any seeking guidance given their use of baseless overinterpretations (*takallufāt wāhiya*) and ideological propagandizing (*tamaḥḥulāt*), utterly devoid of edificatory value,"[70] and contrasts this with his own lettrist approach.

The only time Ṣā'in al-Dīn appears to single out the Ḥurūfiyya for censure is in his second apology, written between *ca.* 832–5/1429–32—that is, in the wake of his arrest, imprisonment, torture and exile on the basis of his claimed Ḥurūfī sympathies. After relating several episodes wherein the author has taken various unnamed Ṣūfī masters to task for the antinomian behavior of their disciples, he offers as the climax to his account a description of his ugly, abortive confrontation in Iṣfahān with a group he styles "the ringleaders of depravity and sedition"; this phase can only refer to the Ḥurūfiyya and their anarchic activities, these being epitomized by the assassination attempt against Shāhrukh in 830/1427. Ṣā'in al-Dīn here identifies them as the most egregious among the contemporary rash of antinomian Ṣūfī movements:

> I have met with and thoroughly admonished many other shaykhs [whose disciples were exhibiting antinomian behavior] . . . A further instance may be mentioned here: Before I left for [Herat (?)], I met in Isfahan with the ringleaders of depravity and sedition (*daftar-i fasād u āshūb*) whose anarchic

[69] In contrast, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī does refer to Faḍl Allāh explicitly and denounces him as a satanic extremist in pursuit of worldly ends, studiously using the terms *ḥarfiyya* or *ahl al-ḥarf* to refer to the practitioners of intellectual lettrism, as opposed to the messianic and incarnationist *ḥurūfiyya* (Fleischer, Ancient wisdom 234–5; Gril, Ésotérisme contre hérésie 186–7, 192–4). For his part, Ṣā'in al-Dīn refers to his fellow lettrists as *ahl al-ḥarf, ramz-khʷānān-i ḥurūf-i Qur'ānī*, or *arbāb-i ʿilm-i ḥurūf*.

[70] *R. al-Bā'iyya*, MS Majlis 10196 f. 122a.

> activities have cast such turbulence (*fitna*) into the world.[71] I addressed them [politely but firmly], but our encounter quickly degenerated into recrimination [on my part] and ended with sheer brazenness [on theirs]. This episode is well-known.
>
> My duty's but to communicate the message
> whether 'tis received with outrage or yawns.[72]
>
> What is an intolerable and indigestible lump in my stomach and a source of unremitting pain to my head is the fact that it was precisely this group that made [preoccupation with the science of letters] a crime in the first place, yet this seeker of knowledge, this poor old man (*pīr-i bīchāra*), who has continually contended with them and admonished and opposed them most assiduously, broadcasting the error of their ways—how incredible it is that they have not suffered in any appreciable way from such an accusation, while this poor wretch's petition has gone for naught and the honor of a seven centuries-old family been polluted with the filth of this accusation and become a universal cud of gossip—a thing unthinkable indeed.
>
> The tulip's in its cups, the narcissus is soaked—
> yet I'm the one accused of debauch?[73]

The primary purpose of this narrative, of course, is to show himself for Shāhrukh's benefit an implacable opponent of messianic and antinomian Ṣūfism in all its guises. Yet his raw, outraged tone here and elsewhere in his apologies also indicates the extent to which he laid blame for the crippling of his lettrist project at the door of both mercenary messiahs and insecure, reactionary schoolmen, Ṣūfīs and otherwise—and the Ḥurūfīs above all.

Obstacles to the Study of Intellectual Lettrism

Ibn Turka, more than any other thinker, was responsible for the mainstreaming of lettrism in the intellectual discourse of early 9th/15th century Iran. That intellectual lettrism persisted after Ṣā'in al-Dīn as a mainstream phenomenon may best be seen in the perhaps unexpected examples of Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 908/1503), the prominent Ashʿari theologian and philosopher of Shīrāz, and Ḥusayn Wāʿiẓ Kāshifī (d. 910/1504), preacher,

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[71] Cf. Muḥammad Ṭūsī's censure of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī in his *R. Majmaʿ al-tahānī u maḥḍar al-amānī*, dedicated to Bāysunghur (iii, 29–35).

[72] Saʿdī, qasida: *tawāngarī na bi māl ast pīsh-i ahl-i kamāl*.

[73] Nafthat al-maṣdūr II 212–5. The hemistich is from Ḥāfiẓ, ghazal: *man na ān rind-am ki tark-i shāhid u sāghar kunam*. The line continues: "I have many judges, O Lord: whom shall I make mine?"

polymath and occultist extraordinaire at the Timurid court in Herat. For his part, Dawānī penned two lettrist treatises, both in Persian, *R. Tuḥfa-yi rūḥānī fī khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* and *R. Tahlīliyya*; the first is concerned with practical-magical or applied lettrism, and references Ibn Turka in this regard, while the second is theoretical in nature and elevates lettrism as a science above both philosophy and mystical theory in the manner pioneered by Ṣā'in al-Dīn.[74] As for Kāshifī, he was, according to his son Fakhr al-Dīn ʿAlī Ṣafī (d. 939/1533), author of no less than five seminal lettrist works.[75] This number includes in the first place his Persian *Jawāhir al-tafsīr*, the first sustained lettrist tafsir of the Qur'ān, which likewise quotes Ibn Turka in a number of places.[76]

Why, then, has Ibn Turka's lettrist thought been so thoroughgoingly suppressed? I noted above that Ṣā'in al-Dīn was in his own lifetime the victim of persecution at the hands of the Shahrukhid state—his disgusted dismissal of the Ḥurūfīs as fringe anarchists notable only for their success in crippling his lettrist project all notwithstanding. That it was only too easy for Ṣā'in al-Dīn's establishment enemies to tar him with the brush of Ḥurūfīsm is one of the great ironies of intellectual history. Moreover, as the promulgator of an alternative, universalist reading of Ibn ʿArabī emphasizing the occult and prophetic, he was largely written out of the Ibn ʿArabī school tradition by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), who eschewed the occult sciences and nurtured a deep grudge against the members of Ibn Turka's Iṣfahān Circle for their refusal to live as professional Ṣūfīs.[77] It is no less ironic that in the last two centuries Ṣā'in al-Dīn

[74] The *R. Tuḥfa-yi rūḥānī* survives in 24 known MSS (see Pourjavady, Kitābshināsī-yi āthār 124–5; Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 248–55); I am preparing an edition and translation of this work for publication. The *R. Tahlīliyya* has been edited and published four times, most recently by Firishta Furūzanda as a separate volume (Tehran 1373 Sh./1994).

[75] These being his *Jawāhir al-tafsīr*, *Tafsīr-i mawāhib, Tuḥfa-yi ʿaliyya fī ʿilm al-ḥurūf, Marṣad al-asnā fī istikhrāj al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*, and *Lawāyiḥ al-qamar* (*Ḥirz al-amān* 9). (The inclusion of the *Mawāhib-i ʿaliyya* and the *Lawāyiḥ al-qamar* is somewhat inexplicable, given that the first is a tafsir with little esoteric content, and the second is wholly concerned with astrological elections.) For its part, ʿAlī Ṣafī's *Ḥirz al-amān min fitan al-zamān* is a scholarly, consolidating treatment of lettrism and its various spiritual and worldly applications; it may be assumed to draw heavily on his father's *Tuḥfa-yi ʿaliyya*, which is apparently lost.

[76] See editor's introduction, *Jawāhir al-tafsīr* 97–98; and Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 261–7 and 271–80. *Contra* Jāmī, Kāshifī, a fellow Naqshbandī and Jāmī's brother-in-law, sees Ṣā'in al-Dīn as very much a part of the Ibn ʿArabī school tradition, inasmuch as he quotes him in the company of both Ibn ʿArabī and Qūnawī in particular.

[77] See Bākharzī, *Maqāmāt-i Jāmī* 106–7; the trope of Ibn Turka and Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī as failed Ṣūfīs survives in the Safavid-era *tadhkira Sullam al-samāwāt* of Shaykh Abū-l-Qāsim

has been remainstreamed in the modern Shīʿī scholastic tradition as a key synthesizer of philosophy and mystical theory precisely by amputating the central lettrist component of his thought. Given such a luxuriant fog of ironies, then, I hardly need say that much further research is required to understand the wider significance of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn's universalist project both vis-à-vis the competing millenarian and messianic currents of his day and in the context of later Islamicate intellectual history generally.

There is a further obstacle, moreover. The general misprision of late medieval occult philosophy aside, that thinkers of the stature of Ibn Turka remain shrouded in richly undeserved obscurity is one of the many pernicious effects of the scholarly narrative, nearly universal until recently, that long dismissed late medieval and early modern Islamicate culture as 'post-classical' and therefore stagnant and hidebound, drunk on artifice and insensible to meaning, glaze-eyed and splayfooted at the Whiggish march of history.[78] To the contrary, the late medieval period in the Islamicate lands is now being increasingly recognized as host to a wide range of grand intellectual and cultural syntheses and creative energies spanning various fields of human endeavor, from philosophy to literature, from astronomy to global trade.[79] This broad recuperation of later Islamicate history still lacks an important component, however, in that it has yet to give due place to occult philosophy as such, preferring to disappear it into Ṣūfism or mystical philosophy on the one hand and extremist messianic movements such as the Ḥurūfiyya on the other, or dismissing it as mere magic, i.e., failed science or debased religion. The doddering convinction that the huge surviving mass of untouched works in manuscript on the various occult sciences, including lettrism, is testimony to the decadence of later Islamicate intellectual history has yet to be explicitly rejected in favor of a systematic study of these texts.[80]

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b. Abū Ḥāmid Anṣārī Kāzirūnī (fl. early 11th/17th c.), sections of which are preserved in Mufīd Mustawfī's *Jāmiʿ-i Mufīdī* (iii, 302).

[78] For recent problematizations of the category 'post-classical' and its invariable association with decline see e.g. Bauer, In Search of 'Post-Classical' Literature; Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, a Study of the Poet Bābā Fighānī Shīrāzī (d. 925/1519); Stearns, Writing the History of the Natural Sciences. On orientalist biases with regard to philosophy see e.g. Gutas, The Study of Arabic Philosophy; Eichner, The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition.

[79] On the millenarian and universalist energies of the 9th/15th century, for example, see Fazlıoğlu, Forcing the Boundaries 1; and Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 12–4.

[80] The association between the occult sciences and decadence in the Islamicate world is exemplified in Abel, La place des sciences occultes dans la décadence.

This reflexive neglect of lettrism, I argue, continues to hamper the study even of later, better-understood movements. A case in point here, and one particularly relevant in the context of the present volume, is Bābism: Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (d. 1267/1850), the Bāb, appears to have been a thoroughgoing lettrist in his own right.[81] It bears emphasizing that there is little need to posit specifically Ḥurūfī influences given the ubiquity in Iran of more mainstream forms of lettrist thought, although the messianic nature of both movements does invite comparison.[82] Tellingly, the phenomenon of Bābī lettrism is often noted in the literature but not pursued.

The picture, thankfully, is not wholly bleak. Due in large part to the labors of Shahzad Bashir and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov most recently,[83] we now have a reliable understanding of the Ḥurūfiyya movement(s) of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī as a fascinating instance of later Islamicate lettrism. The continuation of popular Ḥurūfism directly in the Nuqṭawī movement of Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī on the one hand[84] and indirectly in the Bektashi dervish order in Anatolia and the Balkans on the other[85] has likewise attracted a measure of scholarly interest. What has yet to attract any sustained interest, however, is the fact that in Iran popular gnostic-messianic-Ṣūfī

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[81] This given the precedent of the Shaykhiyya, whose eponym, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1214/1826), argued forcefully for the understanding of the world as text (Cole, The world as text). For example, in his *K. Panj shaʾn* the Bāb credits God with the statement: "I have created the letters and made them the keys of every science (*mafātīḥ kull ʿilm*) . . . [C]onsider everything from the most exalted heights to the lowliest atom: you shall behold it all in the twenty-eight letters, just as you have beheld all the letters in it; and you shall behold all the spirits of the letters in their spirits . . . In brief, all things are confined to the twenty-eight letters (of the alphabet). Likewise, the creation of all things is confined to the meanings contained in these letters" (trans. in MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz* 542–44). As I have shown elsewhere, such a statement could equally well have been made in 7th/13th century Damascus, 8th/14th century Cairo, 9th/15th century Isfahan, or 10th/16th century Herat (see Melvin-Koushki, The Quest 167–283). As a natural application of lettrist theory, moreover, the Bāb placed a premium on the science of talismans (MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz* 544–56; see also Amanat, The Persian *Bayan*, esp. p. 339).

[82] As Denis MacEoin notes, "While many of [the Bāb's] ideas and the forms in which they are cast find important and sometimes detailed parallels in Ismāʿīlī and Ḥurūfī thought in particular, it is not, I think, necessary to look for direct influences from these sources" (*The Messiah of Shiraz* 330).

[83] See e.g. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi*, The Alphabetical Body, Deciphering the Cosmos; Mir-Kasimov, Étude de textes hurûfî anciens, The Ḥurūfī Moses, Notes sur deux textes *ḥurūfī*.

[84] See e.g. Amanat, The Nuqṭawī Movement; Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*; Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān yā Pasīkhāniyān*.

[85] Gölpınarlı, *Hurûfîlik metinleri kataloğu*; Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach* 52–5, 116–26, 235–40; Usluer and Yıldız, Hurufism among Albanian Bektashis.

forms of lettrism were offset by a contemporaneous, vital, mainstream tradition of intellectual lettrism. Our understanding of the science and its importance to later Islamicate intellectual and religious history therefore remains skewed and incomplete.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly examined Ibn Turka's occultist challenge to philosophy and to Ṣūfism, on the one hand, and to Ḥurūfism, on the other—a challenge both mainstream and transgressive. Nor can he be dismissed as a lone voice crying in the wilderness; I remarked above that Ṣā'in al-Dīn, while an outstanding thinker in his own right, is also a representative member of the intellectual elite in the Islamicate heartlands during the late medieval and early modern periods, many of whom similarly embraced a universalist, millenarian ethos. Much further research therefore remains to be done on both Ṣā'in al-Dīn's intellectual project and those of other prominent lettrists of the period. These include, in the first place, Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī, Ṣā'in al-Dīn's own teacher in the occult sciences and pivot of the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' intellectual network,[86] as well as, for example, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī, Ṣā'in al-Dīn's cognate in Anatolia.[87] Indeed, the simple fact that the lettrist thought of far more feted thinkers like Dawānī and Kāshifī has yet to be taken seriously suffices to show how entirely and unjustly late medieval Islamicate intellectual lettrism has been neglected to date.

With respect to early Timurid Iran, the poster child of such neglect remains Ṣā'in al-Dīn himself, occult philosopher and ambitious universalist thinker, who launched a transgressive, virtuoso, lettrist assault on the scholarly norms and epistemological hierarchies of his day—this while fulminating against the syncretic heterodoxy of the Ḥurūfīs and the reactionary conservativism of the schoolmen, both of which had caused him

[86] Akhlāṭī's known works, preserved in a highly piecemeal fashion, include *R. Jafr-i jāmiʿa, R. Jāmiʿiyya* and *R. Ḥuṣūl al-maqāṣid* (Binbaş, Sharaf al-Dīn 152–5). Two further works (or rather two collections of amalgamated sections, *fuṣūl*) on various topics in applied lettrism have been printed to date: *Sifr-i jafr* (Tehran 1386 Sh./2007) and *R. fī Qawāʿid al-jafr wa-ʿilm al-falak wa-zayārij wa-ʿilm al-ḥurūf* (Beirut 2002). Given the scattered nature of Akhlāṭī's surviving output, however, it should be noted that Ṣā'in al-Dīn's own lettrist writings remain the best entrée to his teacher's lettrist doctrine.

[87] See e.g. Fleischer, Ancient Wisdom; Fazlıoğlu, İlk dönem Osmanlı ilim; Gril, Ésotérisme contre hérésie. Fleischer's forthcoming edition and study of al-Bisṭāmī's autobiography promises to shed much-needed light on the themes discussed in this paper.

such misery. It must further be emphasized that his was an assault whose impact was long and keenly felt in certain elite intellectual circles, from Anatolia to India. Lettrism, then, can no longer be considered an interesting but quaint theological aberrance: it is to be recognized as a pervasive, structural, multifarious, contested and abiding aspect of Islamicate intellectual and religious history.

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TIMURID EXPERIMENTATION WITH ESCHATOLOGICAL ABSOLUTISM: MĪRZĀ ISKANDAR, SHĀH NIʿMATULLĀH WALĪ, AND SAYYID SHARĪF JURJĀNĪ IN 815/1412

İlker Evrim Binbaş

Introduction

There is now a consensus among the historians of the Timurid Empire that after the death of Timur in 807/1405 Shāhrukh did not become the sovereign of the entire Timurid polity until the early 820s/1418s. He eliminated Mīrzā Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh, the governor of Fārs, in 817/1414–15 and Qaydu b. Pīr Muḥammad in 821/1418, and subsequently installed his own sons to various appanages, which were erstwhile distributed among other sons of Timur, Jahāngīr (d. 777/1375), ʿUmar-Shaykh (d. 796/1394), and Mīrānshāh (d. 810/1408). Ulugh-Beg was assigned to Samarqand in 811/1409, Bāysunghur to Ṭūs, Nīshābūr, and Astarābād in 818/1415, Ibrāhīm-Sulṭān to Fārs in 817/1414–15, and Soyurghatmish to Kabul in 821/1418–19. In brief, the intervening fourteen years between the death of Timur and the imposition of the Shāhrukhid dispensation over Timur's empire were years of internecine warfare between various Timurid princes.[1]

One way to understand this competition among pretenders to Timur's throne is to analyze it as dynastic power struggle, fuelled and sustained by military, political, and ideological capital accumulated by Timur during his reign. Beatrice Manz argued that Shāhrukh's main advantage over his opponents were the *amīr*s who remained loyal to him after Timur's death. Such powerful *amīr*s as ʿAlika Kökeltash and Amīr Fīrūzshāh swore fealty to Shāhrukh soon after Timur's death. Shāhrukh had also the advantage of marrying Gawharshād, the daughter of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tarkhan, who was one of Timur's most prominent *amīr*s.[2] Jürgen Paul discussed the matter in the context of Khalīl-Sulṭān's short reign in Samarqand after the death of Timur between 807/1405 and 812/1409. Unlike Shāhrukh's power-base which consisted of a significant portion of Timur's army of conquest,

[1] For a detailed discussion of the succession struggle after Timur, see Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* 128–147; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 13–33.

[2] Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 35–40.

Khalīl-Sulṭān's army mainly consisted of 'foreigners' which formed the right wing of Timur's army marching to China. These foreigners included the Qara Tatars, whom Timur had deported from Anatolia, some remnants of the Jalayirid dispensation from 'Irāq, and the Ja'un-i Qurbani, the erstwhile members of the Toghay Timurid dispensation in Khurāsān in the fourteenth century. These groups found themselves under Khalīl-Sulṭān's command simply because he was the commander of the right wing of the army during the Chinese campaign. Therefore, Khalīl-Sulṭān had to rely on a nonintegrated army in the absence of a strong personal retinue (*nöker*), which could have brought integrity to his army in the long term. In the end, Khalīl-Sulṭān failed to articulate a coherent political culture connecting such diverse groups around a common goal, and his army gradually disintegrated.[3]

Another way to read the competition among Timur's descendants is to look at the ideological and constitutional programs that each Timurid figure pursued in this relatively long period of political crisis. Soon after the death of Timur a debate took place among the *amīr*s of Pīr Muḥammad b. 'Umar-Shaykh, who was then the governor of Fārs in Shīrāz, on the different constitutional options that a Timurid prince could adopt. This debate suggests that the challenge that each pretender to Timur's throne had to face after Timur's death was not only political or military, but also constitutional. According to Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, whose *Zubdat al-tawārīkh* (wr. *ca.* 830/1426–27) includes the earliest reference to the incident, there were three options discussed during the meeting. The first option was to abolish the Chinggisid *yasaq>yasa* and *töre* and follow the example of the Muẓaffarids, the previous rulers of Fārs, by acknowledging the sovereignty of the shadow Abbasid caliphs in Cairo. The second option was to recognize the seniority of Mīrānshāh b. Timur, who was in Azerbaijan at that time. The third option was to accept the rule of Shāhrukh, because Timur had given his son 'Umar-Shaykh's widow Malikat Agha, who was also Pīr Muḥammad's mother, to Shāhrukh after her husband's death.[4] The first option clearly proposes the restitution of the Islamic juridical model based on the nominal sovereignty of a caliph, and the

[3] Paul, Khalīl-Sulṭān and the "Westerners" (1405–1407) 11–42.

[4] HAB iii, 44; HAJ ii, 321. A slightly modified version of this story is also found in Samarqandī's *Maṭla'-i sa'dayn.* See SMS ii/1, 22–23. The importance of this account was first emphasized by Barthold in his seminal article on the history of Islamic political ideas. See Bartol'd, Khalif i sultan 48. Later John E. Woods and Beatrice Manz contextualized the report in the conflicting ideological and political projects after Timur's death. See Woods, Timur's Genealogy 115; Manz, Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy 34–35.

second option proposes the reassertion of the Chinggisid sovereignty through Mīrānshāh, whose adherence to the Chinggisid political principles are well documented.[5] After this consultation, Pīr-Muḥammad decided on the third option out of family loyalty, because, as Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū tells us, Timur had given ʿUmar-Shaykh's wife and his mother Malikat Agha bt. Khiḍr Oghlan Chaghatay to Shāhrukh after the death of his father.

In Samarqand, Khalīl Sulṭān b. Mīrānshāh clearly favored Chinggisid political principles. As John E. Woods demonstrated, Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Shāh's genealogical tree, which was the only historiographical specimen produced in Samarqand during his short reign there, had a clear pro-Chinggisid orientation with a special emphasis on the Jöchid and Toluyid lineages. Dispersed in the folios of the *Jung-i Bāysunghurī*, a large collection of calligraphy, painting, and various types of complete or incomplete illuminations, Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Shāh traces the Timurid dynastic lineage back to Alan Qoa, the mythical ancestress of the Chinggisid dynasty. In it, only two figures, the Batuid-Jöchid Jani Bek Khan and Timur, are depicted in color, and the line tracing Khalīl-Sulṭān's lineage to the Mongols is depicted in two parallel lines, a visual device which was used to emphasize preferred lines in Islamic genealogical trees.[6] Shiro Ando's analysis of a miniature which is preserved in another collection prepared in Bāysunghur's workshop lends support to Woods's argument. The miniature depicts Khalīl-Sulṭān's court, and in it the Chinggisids were given the most prominent place to the right of the throne.[7] Khalīl-Sulṭān was himself connected to the Chinggisid family through his mother, Khānzāda Sevin Beg, and his army included substantial Mongol elements. However, Khalīl-Sulṭān also paid nominal respect to his grandfather's wish by enthroning as *khān* Muḥammad Jahāngīr b. Muḥammad-Sulṭān b. Jahāngīr, hence replicating Timur's policy of maintaining a Chinggisid fiction by appointing a puppet *khān*.[8]

We are on more solid footing with respect to Shāhrukh's intentions thanks to his extant letters. In his letter to Mīrānshāh written in 808/1405–06, he proposed that every son and grandson of Timur stay in their own appanages without infringing on the rights of the others. Mīrānshāh had

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[5] Woods, Turco-Iranica II: Notes on a Timurid Decree 333.

[6] Woods, Timur's Genealogy 111. For further discussion on this manuscript, see Binbaş, Structure and Function 509–514.

[7] Ando, Zum timuridischen Staatswesen 17–18.

[8] Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 20. Muḥammad-Sulṭān b. Jahāngīr was not a Chinggisid, but he was the son of Sevin Beg, the granddaughter of the Jöchid Özbek Khan, and married to Khān Sulṭān Khanika, the granddaughter of Buyan Quli Khan Chaghatay.

left Azerbaijan for Khurāsān after witnessing the falling-out between his two sons, ʿUmar-Shaykh and Abā Bakr. Shāhrukh was obviously irritated by his older brother's uninvited intrusion into his own appanage. Similarly, in his letter to the Ottoman Sulṭān Meḥmed I (d. 824/1421) written in Dhū al-Ḥijja 818/January–February 1416, he rebuked the Sulṭān for eliminating his brothers and not respecting their rights by abolishing the Ilkhanid custom (*tura-yi īlkhānī*) and instituting a novel Ottoman custom (*tura-yi ʿUthmānī*).[9] Shāhrukh's letters suggest that at this point his political program was based upon the principle of preserving the status quo as it was instituted by Timur before his death. However, the subsequent events suggest that his initial conservatism informed his overall political program only partially. As recent scholarship demonstrated, Shāhrukh's constitutional program made an eclectic use of various Islamic and Chinggisid elements, such as the parallel invocation of both the *sharīʿa* and the Chinggisid *yasa*.[10] The information discussed above regarding Shāhrukh allows us to understand what his political program was in general, but we still know very little about what he really thought about the constitutional problems that he faced after Timur's death.

In other words, the ideas, intentions and personality of a Timurid prince are just as important in understanding the dynamics of Timurid politics as the depictions of the chroniclers and other contemporary sources. The peerless Jean Aubin posed the most relevant question almost fifty years ago: What do we know about the character of a Timurid prince? Nothing, not much, or mere trivia, he replied to his own question. Aubin made these rather pessimistic remarks in his analysis on the intellectual and artistic patronage of Mīrzā Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh (d. 818/1415). Mīrzā Iskandar was a unique figure among the members of the Timurid family. Like other prominent members of the Timurid dynasty, he was deeply involved in the intellectual debates of his own time and environment, and he tried to cultivate the intellectual potential of Fārs in order to articulate a new constitutional paradigm. We are fortunate to have the record of his intellectual interactions with the prominent figures in the region. More importantly, however, we are able to hear his own voice, or listen to his own questions, which allows us to understand his mindset and the details of his political project. In the following pages, I will first discuss Mīrzā Iskandar's intellectual and political program in light of his relation-

[9] Nawāʾī, *Asnād wa mukātabāt* 163–164.
[10] Manz, Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy 35.

ships with two of his contemporaries, Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī[11] (d. 22 Rajab 834/5 April 1431) and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī[12] (d. 816/1413–14), and I will then discuss the significance of his interaction with these two figures in the context of Timurid politics after Timur's death.

Mīrzā Iskandar's Questions to Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī

Sometime in the early summer of 815/1412, just three years after coming to power in Fārs, Mīrzā Iskandar sent a set of questions to two leading intellectuals of his time: the Ṣūfī shaykh Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī and the theologian Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī. In his questionnaire, he asked them to respond to his queries on various theological issues. The original questionnaire did not survive as an independent text, but it is found embedded in the responses of Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī. Jurjānī's treatise is entitled *Iskandariyya* in the published version, but the manuscripts are either untitled, or carry various titles such as *Risāla dar uṣūl-i dīn* or *Suʾālāt-i Iskandar az Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī*.[13] Shāh Niʿmatullāh's treatise is also variously entitled *Risāla-yi suʾāl wa jawāb*,

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[11] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī is best known as a poet and the eponymous founder of the Niʿmatullāhī Ṣūfī order. He was born in Aleppo in 730/1329–1330, travelled extensively, and lived in Samarqand, Herat, Yazd, and finally Mahan in Kirman. He died on 22 Rajab 834/5 April 1431. His two grandsons migrated to Bidar and established an independent branch of the family in the Bahmanid Sulṭānate. Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī was close to the abovementioned Mīrzā Iskandar, who honoured him with wealthy endowments in and around Yazd in Iran. Ḥamīd Farzām's studies are so far the most comprehensive treatment of his life and times. See the references in bibliography.

[12] Jurjānī is one of those figures whose name we know, but about whom we know very little. In fact, he was arguably one of the most influential intellectuals of late medieval Islamic history, and his books were at the top of the *madrasa* curriculum throughout the Islamic world during the early modern period. He is most famous as a theologian due to the immense popularity of his *Sharḥ al-mawāqif*, a commentary on Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī's *Kitāb al-mawāqif*. Together with Saʿd al-Dīn Taftazānī (d. 792/1390), Jurjānī was one of the *muta'akhkhirūn*, the group of theologians who came after al-Ghazālī. He is also famous for his debates with Taftazānī in the court of Timur, and he was widely considered to be the winner of these debates in the early modern period. The debates of these two gained such an iconic status in later centuries that subsequent generations of scholars were divided in two rival camps called the *Jurjānī* and *Taftazānī* camps according to their positions in these debates. There is no comprehensive study on Jurjānī and his *oeuvre* available in any language. The following titles represent still the best that modern scholarship has so far achieved. See Gümüş, *Seyyid Şerîf Cürcânî*; van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des ʿAḍudaddīn al-Īcī; idem, Die Träume*.

[13] Jurjānī's response was published recently by Muṭlaq, Iskandariyya 1432–1447. I also consulted the following manuscripts: Istanbul Millet Kütüphanesi Ms. Ali Emiri Farisi 1059,

As'ila wa ajwiba, or *Risāla dar jawāb-i su'ālhā-yi Sulṭān Sikandar*.[14] In each treatise, the wording of the questions is slightly different, but the contents of the answers suggest that they both must have received the same set of questions. The approximate date of the questionnaire can be deduced from a remark found at the beginning of Shāh Niʿmatullāh's treatise, in which he states that he received Mīrzā Iskandar's questions on the 4th of Rabīʿ I. Neither treatise mentions the year in which the letter was sent, but as Jean Aubin demonstrated, it is relatively easy to narrow down the possibilities. Mīrzā Iskandar became the de facto ruler of Fārs after his older brother Pīr Muḥammad was assassinated by one of his own *amīr*s on 6 Muḥarram 812/21 May 1409 and Jurjānī died on 6 Rabīʿ II 816/6 July 1413. Therefore, the questionnaire must have been sent between these two dates. The London manuscript of Shāh Niʿmatullāh's treatise, which was also examined by Aubin, is dated to 825/1421–22, but this is clearly a mistake for 815, because Mīrzā Iskandar had been dead for a decade by 825. Therefore, as Aubin suggested, the questionnaire must have been received on 4 Rabīʿ I 815/14 June 1412 by Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, and written by Mīrzā Iskandar shortly before that.[15]

The sixteenth century Niʿmatullāhī tradition presented the debate as the record of a courtly debate that occurred in the presence of Mīrzā Iskandar.[16] During Mīrzā Iskandar's reign in Shīrāz, Jurjānī was indeed in the same city. He had returned there from Samarqand after Timur's death. However, we have very little evidence to suggest that Shāh Niʿmatullāh travelled to Shīrāz at that time. Instead, we have both direct and circumstantial evidence to suggest that Shāh Niʿmatullāh and Jurjānī were responding to a questionnaire prepared by Mīrzā Iskandar. First of all, the subjects and the order in which they occur in the treatises show a remarkable similarity, a feature which would have been more difficult to achieve had they been written independently after an oral debate. Secondly, Shāh Niʿmatullāh clearly says that he received a letter (*nāma'ī*)

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ff. 58b–69a; Tehran Kitābkhāna-yi Shūrā-yi Millī Ms. 10241, ff. 1b–12b. See also van Ess, *Die Träume* 84.

[14] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī's response was published twice. See Farzām, *Rawābiṭ* 43–87; and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi su'āl wa jawāb 1–23. I also consulted the following manuscript: London British Library Ms. Or. Add. 16837, ff. 332b–335b.

[15] Aubin, Le mécénat 79. See also London British Library Ms. Or. Add. 16837, f. 335b. The Tehran copy of Jurjānī's treatise includes a short introduction written by an anonymous author, which also includes the date 815. See Jurjānī, *Su'ālāt-i Iskandar*, f. 1b.

[16] The accounts of Kirmānī and Mufīd were published by Aubin. See Aubin, *Matériaux* 86–87, 179–180. See also Farzām, *Rawābiṭ* 22–24; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 30.

from Mīrzā Iskandar. There is also more circumstantial evidence to support this argument. Jurjānī was famous for his debates with other intellectuals, most prominently with his elder contemporary Saʿd al-Dīn Taftazānī (d. 792/1390), but to the best of my knowledge he left no record of these debates.[17] We know about them mainly through biographical dictionaries and later references. In fact, Shāh Niʿmatullāh's debate with Jurjānī appears to be the main reason why later sources claimed that he travelled to Shīrāz to attend Mīrzā Iskandar's court.[18] Finally, a brief introductory note found at the beginning of the Tehran manuscript of Jurjānī's treatise states that Mīrzā Iskandar sent someone from Iṣfahān to Shīrāz to deliver his questionnaire.[19]

Mīrzā Iskandar's questions are the following, as quoted in Shāh Niʿmatullāh's treatise:

1. What was the first created thing? Some say that it is reason (*ʿaql*), and some say that it is love (*ʿishq*)—each group says something different. Could you kindly explain what the truth of the matter is?
2. What is the purpose behind the creation [of the first created thing—IEB]? Did this purpose precede the creation or did the creation precede the purpose?
3. What is man's origin and point of return? What are the different [intellectual—IEB] positions on this matter? And in your abundant kindness, please provide your own estimable answer.
4. It is said that the rewards (*thawāb*) and punishments (*ʿiqāb*) are given according to each person's actions. What is the nature of such rewards and punishments?
5. It is said that the corporeal body (*jism*) is made of earth (*khākī*) and the spirit (*rūḥ*) is made of light (*nūrānī*). How may earth and spirit be compounded, and what is the process by which this is affected?

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[17] In his *Risāla-yi wujūd*, which exists both in Persian and Arabic, Jurjānī refers to a debate that he took part with a Ṣūfī shaykh on the concept of unity, but he doesn't name the shaykh in question. See Ḥusaynī, Dū risāla 334–335; Jurjānī, Treatise 308–309; Fūda, *Fatḥ al-wadūd* 39–41. Other than with Taftazānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh, Jurjānī was reported to have been engaged in intellectual debates with the famous astronomer Ghiyāth al-Dīn Jamshīd-i Kāshī. See Gümüş, *Seyyid Şerîf Cürcânî* 99–106; Shakībāniyā and Pūrjawādī, Kitābshināsī 186; van Ess, *Die Träume* 43–45, 87; Smyth, Controversy 594–596.

[18] A poem found in Shāh Niʿmatullāh's *Dīwān* and quoted by Farzām as evidence for his travel to Shīrāz would in fact suggest that he never travelled to Mīrzā Iskandar's court. The poem reads: "Oh Shāh! Don't invite me to Shīrāz or to Khurāsān, as I am inclined towards Harāt, and I am the seeker of Samarqand. I am neither a human (*ins*), nor am I a jinni, I am not of the Heaven and the Earth. I am neither from the Bulghar nor from China, but perhaps I am from Uzkand." The poem is quoted by Farzām, *Taḥqīq* 116.

[19] Jurjānī, *Suʾālāt-i Iskandar*, f. 1b = "*ammā baʿd dar shuhūr-i sana-yi khamsa ʿashara wa thamān miʾa Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh az Iṣfahān kas firistād ba Shīrāz nazd-i . . . Sayyid Zayn al-Dīn ʿAlī al-mashhūr bi-Sayyid Sharīf . . . wa az ū suʾāl kard ki . . .*"

6. As for the angels, how are they able to travel instantaneously a distance which can normally only be traversed in a thousand years? What in fact is an angel? What is the nature of Gabriel, and why does he visit only the prophets?
7. As for the ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was it material or spiritual in nature? It is said that during this ascension, Burāq (the Prophet's mount) acted obstinately, such that without the help of Gabriel, the Prophet's journey would have been difficult; [it is further related that] when they reached the eighth level, his mount proceeded no further and at the level of Isrāfīl (*rafraf*) Gabriel also stayed behind. My question is what was the nature of the Prophet's mount, and what was the nature of the help that the Prophet received, why did the Burāq and Gabriel stay behind, and what is Gabriel?
8. It is said that Satan (*Shayṭān*) was created from fire. How can Satan have power over all existents (*kā'ināt*)? What is the nature of Satan, and what is the difference between Satan and the Devil (*Iblīs*)?
9. What realities do Heaven (*bihisht*), Hell (*dūzakh*), and the bridge across Hell (*Ṣirāṭ*) represent? What qualities do the Seven Heavens and Eight Hells have? What is purgatory (*aʿrāf*)?
10. What is the difference between the One (*aḥad*) and the Unique (*wāḥid*)?
11. What is the difference between sainthood (*al-wilāya*), prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), and apostlehood (*al-risāla*)?[20]
12. What is the nature of existence (*wujūd*)?[21]

In the edited version of Jurjānī's treatise, the questions can only be deduced from the chapter (*faṣl*) headings, but some manuscripts of Jurjānī's treatise include the questions of Mīrzā Iskandar separately at the beginning of the treatise. My translation of the questions is based on the manuscript Ali Emiri Farisi 1059:[22]

1. Regarding Creation, what is its purpose (*maqṣūd*)? What was the reason (*sabab*) for creation?
2. What things were created first? Why did the purpose of creation precede [the event of] creation (*khalq*)? As for the first created thing, some say that it was reason (*ʿaql*) and some say that it was love (*ʿishq*), with both groups [observing] something true. What was the first created thing?
3. They say that the corporeal body (*jism*) of human beings was created from earth (*khāk*), while their spirit (*rūḥ*) is spiritual (*rūḥānī*). How does

[20] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi su'āl wa jawāb 4–18.

[21] Questions Ten to Twelve are in Arabic instead of Persian. The twelfth question is submitted, in Arabic, in a separate section which includes Shāh Niʿmatullāh's poetry. Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi su'āl wa jawāb 19–23.

[22] Istanbul Millet Kütüphanesi Ms. Ali Emiri Farisi 1059, ff. 58b–59a. See also Shakībāniyā and Pūrjawādī, Kitābshināsī 141–142.

the compounding of spirit and earth happen? What is the origin of the spirit of human beings? When are they separated from their corporeal bodies? What are their conditions at the beginning and at the end?

4. After the separation of spirit from the corporeal body (*jism*), rewards (*thawāb*) are given according to actions (*ʿamal*). According to this, what is reward and punishment (*ʿiqāb*)? They say that everybody attains to a specific stage (*martaba*) or station (*manzil*); what is the nature of this stage or station?
5. The inner reality of the angels consists in their substance (*jawhar*), and they say that in a blink of an eye they can travel a [a distance normally traversable in] thousand years. How could that be? Why doesn't Gabriel visit anyone but the prophets? And what is the nature of Gabriel?
6. They say that Satan was created from fire, and he has the control (*taṣarruf*) of all existents. Yet doctrine tells us that God's being (*wujūd-i ḥaqq*) controls (*mutaṣarrif*) all existents. How did he [i.e. Satan] acquire this control? What is the nature of Satan?
7. [What realities do] the bridge across Hell (*ṣirāṭ*), the balance [of good deeds and sins] (*mīzān*), and the qualities of heaven and hell [represent]? Why does heaven have seven layers and [hell have] eight layers, neither more nor less? What is purgatory (*aʿrāf*)?
8. As for the ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the Prophet, it is said that on the night of the ascension they brought Burāq (the Prophet's steed), but Burāq was obstinate. Gabriel held it so that the Prophet could mount. When he reached the seventh level of heaven, Burāq remained there; when he reached the level of Isrāfīl (*rafraf*), Gabriel remained there in his turn. Was this ascension material or spiritual in nature? What was Burāq, and what was Gabriel's help? Why did Burāq and Gabriel stay behind? Please offer your own explanation. These questions have been treated many times in books, and each one of the *ʿulamāʾ* has either explained (*taʾwīl*) or commented on (*tafsīr*) [these questions], but no agreement has been reached other than that each argument contradicts the others. Explain these issues in such a way that the soul accepts, the mind is satisfied, and the truth stands revealed.

Following this introductory section, the work consists of a prologue (*muqaddima*), eight sections (*faṣl*s), and an epilogue (*khātima*).[23] A comparison of the contents of the two treatises indicates an almost complete correspondence, and the questions were answered in almost the same order.

[23] This organization is slightly different from that found in the published version. In the published version, the prologue is also the first *faṣl*, hence it comprises nine *faṣl*s and an epilogue. See Muṭlaq, Iskandariyya 1432–1433; Istanbul Millet Kütüphanesi Ms. Ali Emiri Farisi 1059, f. 59a.

	Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī	Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī
1	Creation, and the first creature	Creation and its purpose
2	The purpose of creation	The first creature
3	The origin of man	The nature of matter and spirit
4	Rewards and punishments	Rewards and punishments
5	The nature of matter and spirit	Angels
6	Angels	Satan
7	Ascension	Heaven and Hell
8	Satan	Ascension
9	Heaven and Hell	[The issue of unity]
10	The issue of unity	
11	Sainthood, prophethood	
12	Existence	

In Jurjānī's treatise, the issue of unity (*tawḥīd*) is discussed in the epilogue (*khātima*), and the issues of sainthood and prophethood are not addressed. The fact that these questions are quoted in Arabic instead of Persian might suggest that these are Shāh Niʿmatullāh's interpolations in his treatise, and they were not included in Mīrzā Iskandar's original questionnaire.

An analysis of the differences between the positions of Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī on these questions would give us a snapshot of the differences between philosophical theology and mystical theology in the late medieval Islamic history. But the answers of both intellectuals are so densely argued that an in-depth analysis of even one such answer would require a separate article. For example, on the issue of creation and the first created thing Shāh Niʿmatullāh maintains that it was the *Rūḥ-i aʿẓam*, or the Supreme Spirit, whose substance was light. This light was the manifestation of the eternal and inherent knowledge (*ʿilm-i dhātī-yi azalī*), and also called the First Intellect (*ʿaql-i awwal*). The *Rūḥ-i aʿẓam*, which is also called the *Nafs al-raḥmān, Rūḥ-i kullī*, and *lawḥ-i qaḍā*, is the caliph (*khalīfa*) of the creator, and the entire universe is extracted from it in various degrees.[24]

Jurjānī's reasoning is more analytical, yet at the same time ambiguous. According to Jurjānī, the first created thing was a non-existent substance with no abode (*jawhar-i lā-makānī*). The Ṣūfīs call it the Supreme Caliph (*khalīfa-yi aʿẓam*) and the philosophers call it the First Intellect (*ʿaql-i awwal*) and Thales of Miletus identified it as water. Philosophers also

[24] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi suʾāl wa jawāb 4–6.

argue that there are references or allusions to the First Intellect in the Torah. The Wujūdī Ṣūfīs, i.e. those Ṣūfīs following Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, on the other hand, explain the absolute existence with reference to love. Jurjānī himself argues that the Prophet named three creatures as the first created things: pen, intellect, and light. The latter was the ray of the first created substance, which is called the light of the Prophet, or the *Nūr-i Muḥammadī*.[25] He then presents the viewpoints of the *arbāb-i ta'wīl* and the *aṣḥāb-i ẓāhir*, but doesn't make his own position with respect to these views entirely clear.[26]

Jean Aubin argued that the debate was inconclusive and inconsistent, as this was an exercise designed not to solve a problem, but to augment the profundity of the spiritual culture in early fifteenth century Fārs.[27] He pointed out Shāh Niʿmatullāh's self-confidence in his responses while noting Jurjānī's reluctance to present his own views. He surmised that Jurjānī had to shoulder the burden of answering these questions despite the fact that he had no hopes of winning the argument, and this outcome was mainly determined by the personal relationships of the contestants with Mīrzā Iskandar rather than the quality of their arguments. In fact, Jurjānī appears to have been taken aback by Mīrzā Iskandar's involvement in an intellectual debate. According to him, a ruler should have the magnanimity to delegate some things to his aides (*khuddām*), and not worry about everything.[28] It is indeed true that Shāh Niʿmatullāh appears to have been the party favoured by Mīrzā Iskandar when the questionnaire went out. Sometime between 812/1409–10 and 816/1413–14, Shāh Niʿmatullāh had travelled to Yazd, where Mīrzā Iskandar endowed a hospice for him in Taft, a village to the south west of Yazd.[29]

Yet Aubin's postulation is based on the idea that there was in fact a debate to be won between Shāh Niʿmatullāh and Jurjānī. Another possibility, which Aubin took into account only tangentially, is that Mīrzā Iskandar was not interested in who would win such a debate, but that he was in fact trying to formulate his own synthesis for the political dispensation that he had set out to establish after the death of his elder brother Pīr Muḥammad on 6 Muḥarram 812/21 May 1409. Perhaps Mīrzā Iskandar was

[25] For a detailed discussion on the concept of *nūr Muḥammad*, see Rubin, Pre-Existence and Light, 62–119.
[26] Muṭlaq, Iskandariyya 1444–1446.
[27] Aubin, Le mécénat 79.
[28] Muṭlaq, Iskandariyya 1434.
[29] Farzām, *Taḥqīq* 613–621.

simply trying to legitimize his authority by acquiring the support of the two most prominent intellectuals of the region. This rather mechanistic explanation raises various problems; most significantly it fails to take into consideration the contents of the questions and answers. Furthermore, it ignores the question of why Mīrzā Iskandar would have been interested in these theological problems in a year when the political tensions between Mīrzā Iskandar and his uncle Shāhrukh were about to erupt. Therefore, a more fruitful, and more laborious, way to answer this question is by comparing the contents of the questions with Mīrzā Iskandar's own ideas as they can be assessed in his own writings and through the titles that he assumed on his coinage and which were ascribed to him by his contemporaries, and then to contextualize all these texts vis-à-vis the cultural and political tensions of the time.

The tenth question on the issue of *tawḥīd* is a case in point: What is the difference between the One (*aḥad*) and the Unique (*wāḥid*) as attributes of God? Shāh Niʿmatullāh's answer is succinct: God is One in terms of essence, but Unique in terms of attributes (*Aḥad bi-l-dhāt wa wāḥid bi-l-ṣifāt*). In other words, the One refers to God's substance, which is without any qualities, names, lineage, or attributions. Unicity (*wāḥidiyyat*), however, is the unity of the attributes of the One (*aḥad*), and those attributes are subsumed (*mustahlaka*) in the One.[30] Shāh Niʿmatullāh concludes that God contains or encompasses everything (Q 4:126, 41:54: *Wa-l-llāhu bi-kulli shayʾ muḥīṭ*).[31]

Jurjānī is surprisingly hesitant to discuss the issue of *tawḥīd.* He does not even devote a separate section on the issue, but subsumes the discussion into his conclusion. He argues that the very concept of *tawḥīd* presupposes the plurality of beings, and if anyone wanted to prove the Unity (of Being), it would be similar to "explaining water by referring to a desert mirage." Jurjānī does not entirely reject the concept of Unity, but he considers it merely as a prod to encourage the seeker (*ṭālib*) on the path of seeking the truth, while real *tawḥīd* will happen only in the afterlife.[32]

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[30] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi suʾāl wa jawāb 16–17. Shāh Niʿmatullāh further divides the *waḥdat* into three levels: the *waḥdat* in terms of substance (*dhātiyya*), qualities (*ṣifātiyya*), and actions (*afʿāliyya*). See also Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings of Love* 41–47; Farzām, *Taḥqīq*, 613–621.

[31] Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi suʾāl wa jawāb 17.

[32] Muṭlaq, Iskandariyya 1446–1447. Jurjānī maintains this reconciliatory tone in his *Risāla-yi wujūd*. See Ḥusaynī, Dū risāla 335–337; Jurjānī, Treatise 309–311; Fūda, *Fatḥ al-wadūd* 42–43.

The answer to the question of what *tawḥīd*, or unity, meant had far-reaching consequences in the late medieval context under examination. In theory, the issue is quite simple, as *tawḥīd* simply refers to the monotheistic aspect of Islam, or the affirmation of God's absolute oneness and uniqueness.[33] However, the intervention of Ibn ʿArabī transformed this idea into one of the most controversial concepts in Islamic intellectual history. Ibn ʿArabī posited an ontological unity between God and His creation, referred to by the hotly debated term *waḥdat al-wujūd* that came to be associated with Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine in subsequent generations. *Waḥdat al-wujūd*, or the unity of being, was a radical concept in the sense that it effectively elided the boundaries between the creator and the created, which are otherwise kept separate in Islamic theology. It is natural that such a radical concept created shock waves which virtually never abated in Islamic intellectual history. Though the sharīʿa-minded intellectuals tried relentlessly to refute the idea of the unity of being, those who were sympathetic to Ibn ʿArabī's mystical philosophy, especially the Ṣūfīs, strove to accommodate the idea in the context of Islamic theology. Furthermore, as Marshall Hodgson observed, much of late medieval and early modern freethinking and radicalism should be treated as offshoots of Ibn ʿArabī's unitive cosmology.[34]

Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, a great promoter of Ibn ʿArabī, explains the concept of *tawḥīd* along the lines of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the unitive cosmology which argued for the unity of the Creator and the created.[35] Jurjānī's views on Ibn ʿArabī, however, have not been studied in the secondary literature in any significant detail. Jurjānī agreed to a certain extent with the critics of Ibn ʿArabī's monistic Ṣūfism in the Timurid period, but he also tried to reconcile the Ṣūfī understanding of unity with a more philosophical and theological interpretation.[36] The debate between Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī should not be understood as a Ṣūfism vs. *kalām* controversy. The fact that Jurjānī was a "disciple" of the proto-Naqshbandī Ṣūfī Shaykh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār demonstrates that Jurjānī's opposition was

[33] Gimaret, Tawḥīd 389.

[34] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* 462–467. The complex history of the debate around the ideas of Ibn ʿArabī in late medieval and early modern periods was discussed by A. Knysh. See Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi*.

[35] For Ibn ʿArabī's understanding of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* 15–29; *idem.* Waḥdat al-Shuhūd 37–39.

[36] Ḥusaynī, Dū risāla; Jurjānī, Treatise; Fūda, *Fatḥ al-wadūd* 31–43. For further discussion on this debate in the Timurid period, see also Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi* 141–165, and Bakri Aladdin's introduction to his edition of al-Nābulusī, *al-Wuǧūd al-ḥaqq* 15–43.

specific to more messianic varieties of Ṣūfism imbued with Ibn ʿArabī's philosophical mysticism.[37] Contrary to this view, some scholars interpreted the relationship of Shāh Niʿmatullāh with Jurjānī as a sign of the "emerging clemency and generous spirit of the tyrant's [i.e. Timur's] sons and grandsons."[38]

So, how would this issue be relevant for the politics that Mīrzā Iskandar pursued? I noted above the possibility that Mīrzā Iskandar was in the process of formulating his own constitutional framework when he sent his questionnaire to Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī. Such an argument needs to be supported by two specific sets of evidence. First of all, we need to hear the voice of Mīrzā Iskandar himself, and secondly, we should be able to demonstrate the impact of this new constitutional framework on Mīrzā Iskandar's policies. Fortunately, we have sources to discuss both aspects of the issue and the second part of this article will be devoted to their analysis.

Dībācha-yi Jāmiʿ al-Sulṭānī by Mīrzā Iskandar

Mīrzā Iskandar wrote the *Dībācha* for the *Jāmiʿ al-sulṭānī*, a book on astronomy, which was based on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's (d. 672/1274) *Zīj-i Īlkhānī*. Unfortunately, the main body of the book consisting of twenty chapters has not come down to us. We know that Mīrzā Iskandar had a deep interest in astronomy, but we cannot be sure if he himself was the author of the main work, or if he penned only the *Dībācha* and the main text was written by one of the scholars attending to his court.[39] The

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[37] Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns* 394.

[38] Graham, Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī 185. According to a story which was recorded by ʿAbd al-Razzāq Kirmānī, the hagiographer of Shāh Niʿmatullāh, the latter once came to Shīrāz, and Jurjānī greeted him. As soon as Jurjānī embraced Shāh Niʿmatullāh, it started to rain, and he said "God's bounty is with us, and God's mercy is upon us, and that is God's grace to us (*Niʿmatullāh maʿnā wa raḥmat Allāh ʿalaynā wa dhālika faḍl Allāh bi-nā*)." See Aubin, *Matériaux* 86.

[39] Ghiyāth al-Dīn Jamshīd-i Kāshī was in the retinue of Mīrzā Iskandar before he joined Ulugh Beg's team in Samarqand, and he wrote a little treatise on astronomical observational instruments and the *Mukhtaṣar dar ʿilm-i hayʾat*, a mathematical treatise, which he dedicated to Mīrzā Iskandar in *ca.* 813/1410–1411. See Kennedy, al-Kāshī's Treatise 98–108. Al-Kāshī was also the author of the *Zīj-i Khāqānī*, an astronomical table, which he completed in 816/1413–1414 and dedicated to Ulugh Beg. See Bāqirī, *Az Samarqand ba Kāshān* 20. However, we have no evidence to suggest that Mīrzā Iskandar wrote the *Dībācha-yi Jāmiʿ al-sulṭānī* for a work that al-Kāshī composed. It should also be pointed out that Sayyid Sharīf Jurjāni also wrote an astronomical treatise, or a commentary on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's *al-Tadhkira fī ʿilm al-hayʾa* in Shīrāz in the middle of Dhū-l-Ḥijja 811/30 April 1409,

unique copy of the *Dībācha* is found in the Cambridge University copy of Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī's *Munshaʾāt*.[40]

Mīrzā Iskandar begins by praising God, and explains how He invested the secrets of kingship and heavenly sovereignty (*mulk wa malakūt*) in the stature of human beings, how He made their horoscopes (*zāyija*) conjunctions of external and internal perfection and fortune, how He made their bodies repositories of divine and natural marks, and how He taught Adam all the names and appointed him His viceroy, or caliph on Earth.[41]

The first part of the *Dībācha* deals with the parameters of Mīrzā Iskandar's political authority, which is followed by a brief description of the *Jāmiʿ al-sulṭānī.* Mīrzā Iskandar describes himself as nothing less than a philosopher king. He says that God elected him with his divine support (*taʾyīd-i ilāhī*) from among the people and granted him the robe of both the external/formal and the spiritual caliphate (lit. *khilʿat-i khilāfat-i ṣūrī wa maʿnawī bar qāmat-i qābiliyyat wa bālā-yi himmat-i ū burd*), and his nature was illuminated by the secret of sainthood. He is the Sulṭān, and in this capacity, he is God's caliph on earth. He is a caliph externally, but also divinely inspired interiorly. Moreover, God made his external self a manifestation of kingship (*maẓhar-i daqāʾiq-i maṣāliḥ-i salṭanat wa pādishāhī*), and his inner self a manifestation of advanced scientific knowledge and divine wisdom (*maẓhar-i daqāʾiq-i ʿulūm wa maʿārif-i ilāhī*). These qualities he has in addition to his justice and his credentials in all the branches of the traditional and speculative sciences and the practice and theory of law (*jamīʿ-i ʿulūm-i manqūl wa maʿqūl wa furūʿ wa uṣūl* [*al-dīn*]). Iskandar does not hesitate to emphasize that the reason for his excellence was not only his hard work and diligence, but also divine inspiration, as statesmen are divinely inspired (*arbāb al-duwal mulhamūn*).[42]

Mīrzā Iskandar then explains how he is well versed in all the sciences, but he is also aware that the purpose of the creation of man is to understand

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just a month before the assassination of the governor of Fārs, Pīr Muḥammad, who was a brother Mīrzā Iskandar. See Matvievskaia and Rozenfel'd, *Matematiki i astronomy* ii, 476 (No. 424 A1).

[40] Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh, Dībācha 207–211. It is important to note that the earliest copies of the *Munshaʾāt,* i.e. Topkapı Palace Library Ms. Revan Köşkü 1019 and Kütahya Vahid Paşa Kütüphanesi Ms. 621–622, do not include this text. See also Browne and Nicholson, *A Descriptive Catalogue* 108; Aubin, Le mécénat 80–83. Aubin translated bulk of the treatise into French in his article.

[41] Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh, Dībācha 208.

[42] Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh, Dībācha 209. Towards the end of his reign, Mīrzā Iskandar's perfection in different branches of the sciences will be pronounced more vocally. See Anonymous, Synoptic Account of the Timurid House 91.

the names and attributes of God. The Ṣūfīs call this the science of unity (*ʿilm-i tawḥīd*), and they use unveiling (*kashf*) and discernment (*dhawq*). Some traditionalist scholars (*muḥaqqiqān-i ʿulamāʾ-i rusūm*) who are not content with simple imitation (*taqlīd*) preferred to employ their reason to understand this unity. Some of them chose dialectical theology (*kalām*) and some of them chose metaphysics (*ḥikmat-i ilāhī*). Mīrzā Iskandar himself also learned the science of unity (*ʿilm-i tawḥīd*) through the science of letters (*ʿilm-i ḥurūf*) in particular, whose emergence was one of the peculiarities of the time of the Prophet. After analyzing all the branches of learning which were the constitutive parts of the the science of unity, he decided that none of them was as important as astronomy, and mathematics was its crucial component. Therefore, he decided to compose the *Jāmiʿ al-Sulṭānī* on mathematical astronomy (*ʿilm-i hayʾat*).[43]

Mīrzā Iskandar's *Dībācha* formulates a rather curious political theology, which manifests itself in the conjunction of two seemingly unrelated concepts. The first one is his definition of the caliphate (*khilāfa*) and the second one is his emphasis on the science of unity. According to Mīrzā Iskandar, the caliphate has two aspects, external (*ṣūrī*) and spiritual (*maʿnawī*), and he himself is the repository of both external and spiritual aspects of the caliphate. The idea of the caliph as the focal point of both religious and political authority comes from Ibn ʿArabī's definition of the caliphate.[44] As Michel Chodkiewicz discussed, Ibn ʿArabī equated the caliph with the pole (*quṭb*), the true sovereign of the entire cosmos at any particular moment. A caliph, or a pole, may have both internal and external qualities, although some caliphs have only internal qualities. For example, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī, i.e. the first four caliphs according to the canonical Sunnī projection of history, as well as Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, Muʿāwiya b. Yazīd, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and al-Mutawakkil carried both the internal and external qualities of the caliphate, but Aḥmad b. Hārūn al-Rashīd, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and the majority of the other caliphs, or poles, carried only the internal quality of the caliphate. Therefore, Chodkiewicz observes, the apparent holders of power are mere substitutes (*nuwwāb*) for the Pole.[45]

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[43] Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh, Dībācha 210–211. For an overview of the concept of *tawḥīd* in Islam, see Gimaret, Tawḥīd, 389. For the prominence of the concept of *tawḥīd* in the late medieval history, see Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* ii, 462–467.

[44] The evolution of the term *khalīfa* during the later Islamic periods is a poorly studied subject. Arnold's *The Caliphate* is still the most comprehensive overview. See Arnold, *The Caliphate.* For an exemplary discussion on an earlier period, see Crone, *God's Caliph.*

[45] Chodkiewicz, The Esoteric Foundations 194.

The concept of unitive cosmography in the *Dībācha* is a clear indication of the fact that Mīrzā Iskandar played with the idea of sacral kingship and tried to construct his own political authority along the lines of Ibn ʿArabī's theological absolutism in order to create a novel model of sacral kingship, which is a concept often ascribed to the Shīʿī imams and other messianic figures in Islamic history.[46] In all likelihood, the questionnaire that he sent to Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī was part of his attempts to cultivate the intellectual capital of the region for his own constitutional program. When we compare the discourses on *tawḥīd* as expressed in the *Dībācha* with those proposed by Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, we see that Mīrzā Iskandar tried to adopt a reconciliatory position through equating *ʿilm-i tawḥīd* with the *ḥikmat-i ilāhī*.[47] In other words, Mīrzā Iskandar was seeking to define his authority in theological terms, not in traditional juridical terms, and this was probably the reason why he was interested in learning more about the differences between the philosophical theology of Jurjānī and the mystical theology of Shāh Niʿmatullāh.

The ideas discussed in these three short texts acquire their full meaning in a particular historical moment in which Mīrzā Iskandar was the main actor. Without understanding that context, these ideas might sound like mere clichés, and without paying due attention to the ideas expressed in these treatises, Mīrzā Iskandar may look like a delusional political opportunist. In the final part of my article, I will discuss this particular political and intellectual context and their relation to the ideas discussed above.

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[46] Mīrzā Iskandar must have borrowed the ideas of the internal and external caliphate from Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī and his circle. But, in Niʿmatullāhī parlance, Sainthood belongs only to the fourth caliph ʿAlī, the twelve Shiʿī *imām*s, and the four *quṭb*s. The worldly ruler can only be a caliph externally. According to Ṭabasī, who was one of the disciples of Shāh Niʿmatullāh, Shāhrukh was the caliph of the material world (*khalīfa-yi mulk*) and Qāsim-i Anwār was the caliph of the spiritual world (*khalīfa-yi malakūt*), whereas sainthood was granted to Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī. See Darwīsh Muḥammad Ṭabasī, Jām-i jahān-namā-yi Shāhī 336; Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings of Love* 41. For Divine Kingship in the Islamic context, see Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship* 188–206, and more specifically see Binbaş, *Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī* 333–356.

[47] This is also well attested in contemporary and near contemporary sources, see Farzām, *Taḥqīq* 228–230.

The Interplay of Ideas and Events: The Timurid Politics and Divine Unity

Mīrzā Iskandar was certainly not just an intellectual with an interest in the intricacies of Islamic theology and philosophy.[48] Born in Uzgend in 786/1384, he spent most of his early life in Farghāna, the former appanage of his father ʿUmar-Shaykh. When ʿUmar-Shaykh was given the newly-conquered Fārs as his new appanage in 795/1393, the nine year old Mīrzā Iskandar also moved to Shīrāz in order to join his father. When ʿUmar-Shaykh died in the following year, in 796/1394, Timur gave the control of Fārs to Pīr Muḥammad. Mīrzā Iskandar had to wait until 806/1404 for his own share in the Timurid appanage system, when he received Hamadān, Nahāvand, Burūjird, and Lur-i Kūchak as his own appanage.[49] On 6 Muḥarram 812/21 May 1409 during a campaign to Kirmān, which he launched with the help of his brother Mīrzā Iskandar, Pīr Muḥammad was killed by one of his own *amīr*s, Ḥusayn Ṭabīb or Sharbatdār. Mīrzā Iskandar abandoned the campaign and returned to Shīrāz, where Pīr Muḥammad's *amīr*s submitted to him and handed over the treasury.[50] This was the beginning of Mīrzā Iskandar's rule in Fārs.

According to Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, who is a notoriously pro-Shāhrukhid historian, Mīrzā Iskandar initially confirmed his obedience to Shāhrukh by minting coins in his name and reading his name in the Friday sermon, and requested the presence of one of his brothers in Fārs, a curious request likely informed by his desire to eliminate a potential rival.[51] Mīrzā Iskandar's submission to Shāhrukh must have been a tactical move at this point, because the numismatic and other available literary evidence suggest that he was certainly drifting away from the idea of a Herat-based Timurid polity in favour of a Shīrāz-based independent dispensation. He had by that time already started to experiment with various symbols of sovereignty by taking the title of the governor of the Mongol nation (*īl wa ulūs-i Mughūl*) in 806/1403–04, when he was appointed as the governor of Hamadān. He experimented in his coinage with the idea of "condominium sovereignty," in which Shāhrukh and Mīrzā Iskandar were considered

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[48] The standard account on Mīrzā Iskandar's life is Soucek, Eskandar 3–87. See also *idem*, Eskandar Solṭān 603–604; Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion* 29–33.

[49] Soucek, Eskandar 76–77.

[50] HAB iii, 340–49; HAJ ii, 333–335.

[51] HAB iii, 350; HAJ ii, 339.

two equal sovereigns reigning in a single polity.[52] More significantly, however, he adopted the title *sulṭān*, a sign of virtual political independence began in 812/1409.[53] Therefore, Mīrzā Iskandar's defiant attitude toward his uncle was not the reaction of a moment, but the culmination of a long-term trajectory.[54]

Shāhrukh's dispensation in Herat was going through a similar transformation towards consolidation. Initially, Shāhrukh was content with the relatively modest and old-fashioned title *al-sulṭān al-aʿẓam*. However, in 812/1409, the year in which Mīrzā Iskandar came to power in Fārs and adopted the title *sulṭān*, Shāhrukh adopted the title *khalīfa*, and in the following year, in Dhū al-Qaʿda 813/February March 1411, he ceremonially declared the abrogation of the Mongolian dynastic code, i.e. the *yasa*, and reinstituted the *sharīʿa.*[55] As Beatrice Manz convincingly discussed,

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[52] Mīrzā Iskandar's condominium coin includes the Arabic dual form *al-sulṭānān* and includes the names of both Shāhrukh and Mīrzā Iskandar. See Album, A Hoard of Silver Coins 120–121. Recently John E. Woods and I had the opportunity to work on a better preserved specimen of this type of Mīrzā Iskandar's coin at the magnificent coin collection of Tübingen University. The inscription on this coin (HI2 C6, HI2 D1, its variant HI2 D2) reads: "*Sulṭānān Sulṭān Shāhrukh Bahadur wa Iskandar Bahadur khallada Allāh taʿālā salṭanatahumā.*" I am indebted to Dr. Lutz Ilisch, the director of the Forschungsstelle für islamische Numismatik in Tübingen, for providing excellent working conditions during our visit, and to Professor John E. Woods for suggesting the concept of "condominium sovereignty" to me.

[53] Iskandar minted coins on which he designated himself as the brother of *Amīr* Shāhrukh and adopted the title *sulṭān* (*al-akh al-Amīr Shāhrukh* [sic.] *Shīrāz al-Sulṭān Iskandar*). See Album, *Iran* pl. 48. This coin was minted in Yazd and countermarked in 812/1409. Our sources are not unanimous on the date when Mīrzā Iskandar adopted the title *sulṭān.* Mawlānā Luṭfī, the Chaghatay poet who was an attendant in Mīrzā Iskandar's court, called him *Sulṭān Sikandar* in 814/1411–1412. See Rieu, *Catalogue* 286. The Synoptic account, which was written in 816/1413, calls him *Sulṭān Ghāzī.* Jaʿfarī, a historian from Yazd, who was very close to Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī, gives the year 815/1412–1413. Another historian from Yazd, Ibn Shihāb-i Yazdī, who wrote his universal history *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh-i Ḥasanī* between 855/1451–1452 and 857/1453, sets the date when Mīrzā Iskandar adopted the title *sulṭān* to 812/1409. See Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i kabīr* 302b (text); 72 (trans.); Ibn Shihāb-i Yazdī, *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh-i Ḥasanī* 19. Ibn ʿArabshāh's rather garbled account also suggests that Mīrzā Iskandar's dynastic ambitions date back to 812/1409. See Ibn ʿArabshāh, *ʿAjā'ib al-maqdūr* 439. The only extant document, or *farmān*, issued by Mīrzā Iskandar, is also dated to 816/1414, and is preserved at the David Collection in Copenhagen. In this *farmān* also the title *sulṭān* was ascribed to Mīrzā Iskandar. See Fraser and Kwiatkowsky, *Ink and Gold* 104–107. I was informed by Kjeld von Folsach, the curator of the collection, that a publication on this magnificent piece of art work, which has also immense historical importance, is currently being undertaken (personal communication 08-09-2011).

[54] In the *Zubdat al-tawārīkh* of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, Pīr Muḥammad addresses his brother as the one who controls the "Mongol nation": "*īl wa ulūs-i Mughūl ki dar taḥt wa taṣarruf-i ān barādarand.*" See HAB iii, 49.

[55] According to Album's catalogue, Shāhrukh started to use the title in 819/1416–1417, but he minted coins in Herat bearing the term *khilāfa* as early as 812/1409–1410. See

Shāhrukh was not trying to distance himself from his pro-Chinggisid father by abolishing the *yasa.* Rather, he was trying to find a new source of legitimization through cultivating the intellectual resources of the region.[56]

In 815/1413, Iskandar addressed a letter to Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī's brother, Qiwām al-Dīn Yazdī, inviting him to join all the prominent intellectuals of Fārs who were already in his service. As is clearly expressed in this letter, in which Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī's name is also mentioned, Mīrzā Iskandar was well aware to which extent he was able to capitalize on the intellectual resources of Fārs.[57] The titles ascribed to the young prince in the letter demonstrate the high hopes of the intellectual elite of the region for an imminent Iskandarid dispensation: "Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dīn Iskandar may God prolong his rule, authority, and caliphate, without exaggeration or doubt the seal of the promising Sulṭāns."[58] Although we cannot be entirely sure about the chronological sequence of Iskandar's questionnaire and his letter, these documents should be read in relation to each other. The titles that Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī gives to Iskandar provide the framework for the new approach that Iskandar was preparing to adopt: "the sublimest of the Sulṭāns, shadow of God on Earth, the refuge of the caliphate, and manifestation of the sheer divine benevolence."[59]

If Shāhrukh was able to cultivate the support of his father's most important *amīr*s, obviously Mīrzā Iskandar was clearly attempting to cultivate a different kind of political authority, an authority which had its roots in the rich intellectual and cultural life of Fārs and the newly emerging interregional informal networks.[60] A year later, i.e. in 816/1413–14, Shāhrukh in Khurāsān and Mīrzā Iskandar in Fārs emerged as the two sovereign rulers of the Timurid domains, and as such were on a collision course.

Album, *Checklist* 260; Rubāyʿī, Dāqūq 80; Komaroff, The Epigraphy 217. The date on which Shāhrukh abrogated the Chinggisid *yasa* is given by Qāyinī, *Naṣā'iḥ-i Shāhrukhī* ff. 2a–2b. For the relationship on *yasa* and the *sharīʿa* in late medieval Islamic history, see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual* 273–292.

[56] Manz, Family 68–69.

[57] This letter was published by Mahdī Bayānī and Francis Richard. See Bayānī, Majmūʿa-yi Munshaʾāt 241–244; Richard, Un témoignage 65–72.

[58] Richard, Un témoignage 66 = "*Sulṭān Jalāl al-Dunyā wa al-Dīn Iskandar khallada Allāh taʿālā mulkahu wa sulṭānahu wa khilāfatahu ki bī takalluf wa mubālagha khātim-i salāṭīn-i jawānbakht . . . ast.*"

[59] "*Aʿlā al-salāṭīn, ẓill Allāh fī al-arḍ, ḥaḍrat-i khilāfat-panāh, maẓhar-i muṭahhar-i alṭāf-i ilāhī.*" See, Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, Risāla-yi suʾāl wa jawāb 1.

[60] For informal networks in late medieval Islamic history, see Binbaş, *Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī* 76–107.

The ostensible circumstances in which the two princes clashed with each other are disputable on each side. In the autumn of 816/1413, Shāhrukh launched a campaign to western provinces. Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū would have us believe that the objective of the campaign was to regain ʿIrāq-i ʿArab and Azerbaijan, which had been lost to Qara Yūsuf Qaraquyunlu in 810/1408. According to Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, it is only when Mīrzā Iskandar declined to support the war against the Qaraquyunlu and declared his independence that Shāhrukh diverted his attention to Fārs and attacked Mīrzā Iskandar.[61]

In fact, just before the arrival of Shāhrukh's message summoning him to join the campaign against the Qaraquyunlu, Mīrzā Iskandar had himself already launched a campaign against Qara Yūsuf Qaraquyunlu in Hamadān. However, Qara Yūsuf fell ill before any confrontation was possible, and withdrew to Tabriz on 10 Jumāda II 816/7 September 413.[62] Feeling secure and unchallenged by the Qaraquyunlu, Mīrzā Iskandar must have perceived Shāhrukh's western campaign as a move against himself, not against the Qaraquyunlu. He sent letters to Sijistān, Qandahār, and Garmsīr, and asked for the participation of the troops based in those regions in a campaign against Shāhrukh. In his letters he called himself "Sulṭān Iskandar, the advocate of the affairs of the Muslims and the associate/guardian of the Commander of Believers." Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū tells us that it was at this very moment that Mīrzā Iskandar declared his independence in earnest and adopted the title *sulṭān*, although, as discussed above, we have sufficient evidence to suggest that he had been using the title since at least 812/1409.[63]

Two pro-Iskandarid histories, which were both written in 816/1413, may help us to better understand the prevailing mood in the Iskandarid circles. As opposed to Shāhrukh's tone in his letter describing Mīrzā Iskandar as a "child," a pro-Iskandarid anonymous historian described Shāhrukh as someone whose most outstanding virtue was his love of Mīrzā Iskandar.[64] Muʿīn al-Dīn Naṭanzī (fl. 818/1415), another pro-Iskandarid historian, went even further by saying that Shāhrukh pursued the "pleasure of government

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[61] HAB iii, 491–505; HAJ ii, 345–350. See also Nawā'ī, *Asnād* 364–365.

[62] HAB iii, 493, 507–509; Sümer, *Kara Koyunlular* 92–93.

[63] "*Al-qā'im bi-umūr al-muslimīn wa walī amīr al-Mu'minīn al-Sulṭān Iskandar*." See HAB iii, 501. The exact meaning of the term *amīr al-mu'minīn* is open to debate in Mīrzā Iskandar's letter. Since the letter was written at about the same time when a messianic ideology was developing around the persona of Mīrzā Iskandar, it most probably refers to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālīb.

[64] Anonymous, Synoptic Account of the Timurid House, 93; HAB iii, 494–500 (especially 494–496 for Shāhrukh's letter); HAJ ii, 345–348. See also Nawā'ī, *Asnād* 158–159.

(*lazzat-i ḥukūmat*)" under the influence of Mīrzā Iskandar.[65] These statements are certainly not mere fabricated propaganda. The anonymous Synoptic Account clearly indicates that a Timurid neo-eponymous lineage was about to be initiated in 816/1413.

> Although there are great records of past sultans and emperors, His Majesty the **Sultan Ghazi** [i.e. Timur—İ.E.B.] and His Highness Prince Umar-Shaykh annulled them all and established records impossible to equal, yet His Highness [Iskandar—İ.E.B.] has achieved such works and left such a record of deeds in the world that all the perfection of the [aforementioned] two sultans and so many thousands of other rulers would also be effaced from the pages of the mind and the ledgers of thought.[66]

Naṭanzī's description of Mīrzā Iskandar and his political program is much more radical than the Synoptic Account. In his chronicle, he calls Mīrzā Iskandar the "Messiah of the Last Days (*mahdī-yi ākhir al-zamān*)," and refers to a contract (*ʿahd-nāma*) between Timur and Mīrzā Iskandar, which named him as the legitimate successor to Timur.[67] In this capacity, Mīrzā Iskandar was the first ruler of the fifteenth century who was ascribed the title Mahdī, the eschatological Savior who would appear before Apocalypse. Indeed, Mīrzā Iskandar made ample use of a messianic symbolism tinged with ʿAlid, or outright Shīʿī discourse in his administrative and political discourse. Some of his coins include Twelver-Shīʿī version of the *kalimat al-tawḥīd*, although as Album observes, some of these coins also include the names of the *Rāshidūn* caliphs as well as the names of the *Imām*s.[68] Whether he was a Shīʿī, a Sunnī, or both, the ascription of the

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[65] NMT, 433.

[66] Anonymous, Synoptic Account of the Timurid House 91.

[67] NMT, 433. Priscilla Soucek convincingly argues that the discourse of Naṭanzī on this contract resembles the concept of the *naṣṣ*, whereby a Shīʿī *imām* designates his successor. Soucek, Eskandar 76. The section on Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh's messianic claims is found only in the London manuscript, i.e. the first recension, of the *Muntakhab*, which was written for Iskandar b. ʿUmar-Shaykh. Not surprisingly, the second recension, which is a modified version of the first recension dedicated to Shāhrukh, excludes this section. For different versions of the *Muntakhab*, see Woods, The Rise 89.

[68] Album, *Checklist* 260. See also www.Zeno.ru No. 62447 (accessed 14 July 2012). Recently Azfar Moin argued that the figure of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib filled the gap that was left empty by the abandonment of the Chinggisid principles of politics after the death of Timur. According to Moin, the emergence of the title *ṣāḥīb-qirān*, i.e., lord of the auspicious conjunction, and the figure of ʿAlī marked a ritual process through which was forged a new form of political legitimacy based on messianic principles. Although Moin's otherwise excellent study aptly explains the sixteenth century concepts of sacral sovereignty in the context of the Mughal Empire, he does not address the question of how these ideas were negotiated among the various Timurid factions in the fifteenth century. See Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign* 23–55.

title Mahdī to Mīrzā Iskandar was in fact an attempt to redefine the nature of his own political authority along the lines of eschatological universalism, which became a hallmark of the late medieval and early modern absolutist political ideologies. The solution was novel in the sense that it rendered the terms "political" and "religious" virtually meaningless in themselves. The political became religious, and the religious became political.[69]

We do not know when exactly in 816/1413–14 Naṭanzī wrote his chronicle, but the anonymous Synoptic Account was copied on 21 Rabīʿ I 816/21 June 1413, that is before Shāhrukh advanced to Māzandarān in the month of Rajab/September–October. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret the reactionary political discourse formulated in Mīrzā Iskandar's letters and in the two pro-Iskandarid chronicles as simple responses to Shāhrukh's "expansionism." When Shāhrukh launched his campaign to Fārs, Mīrzā Iskandar had already developed an elaborate ideological fiction to support his sovereignty over Timur's empire.

Mīrzā Iskandar's dynastic ambitions were very short-lived. Shāhrukh invaded Fārs in the spring of 817/1414, and the bloody conflict between the two rivals ended up with the complete destruction of Mīrzā Iskandar's troops. After a protracted siege of Iṣfahān, which ended on 14 Rabīʿ I 817/3 June 1414, Shāhrukh captured Mīrzā Iskandar and gave him to his brother Mīrzā Rustam b. ʿUmar-Shaykh. Mīrzā Rustam first had Mīrzā Iskandar blinded and then later executed.

Politically, Iskandar's enterprise was a failure, as his ideological machinery was no match for Shāhrukh's formidable war machine supported by the powerful *amīr*s whom he had inherited from Timur, but ideologically he succeeded in setting the tone of the political discourse in subsequent years and decades.[70] In the *Dībācha*, Mīrzā Iskandar depicted himself as a sacral sovereign who had achieved perfection both internally and externally. He was the ultimate repository of all sciences, including astronomy, and he held the absolute power endorsed by God. The key to understand

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[69] Such an approach also explains why the issue of the *imāma* was still discussed in the *kalām* literature as part of the *uṣūl al-dīn.* Scholars usually attributed this fact to the extreme conservatism of the late medieval theologians (Crone), or to attempts of countering Shīʿī notions of *imāma* (Madelung, Fazlıoğlu). See Crone, *God's Rule* 223; Madelung, Imāma 1168–1169; Fazlıoğlu, Osmanlı 382–383.

[70] Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū emphasizes the role of the *amīr*s in the transmission of power from Mīrzā Iskandar to Shāhrukh. According to him, those *amīr*s whom Iskandar sent to capture Sāwa came across a group of *amīr*s from the army of Shāhrukh. Shāhrukh's *amīr*s argued that a son (*farzand*) is more suitable for the throne than a grandson (*farzandzāda*). See HAB iii, 524–525.

this absolute perfection was the *ʿilm-i tawḥīd*, a concept which allowed him to claim both temporal and religious authority. His questionnaire to Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī and Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī was most probably meant to develop and support his arguments on the authority of these two titans of his time. The questions that he directed at them exclusively concern the question of the separation of this world from the next, of spirit and substance, and ultimately about the relationship between God and man. In Mīrzā Iskandar's political theology, if there was a unity in the cosmos, it was natural that a single ruler should reign in this world. I would further argue that he adopted ʿAlid terminology and eschatological discourse with this political aim in view. If the rise of absolutist politics is one of the benchmarks for early modernity, in 816/1412 Shāhrukh was the last medieval Islamic ruler, and Mīrzā Iskandar was the first early modern absolutist sovereign, albeit an unsuccessful one.

Mīrzā Iskandar's experimentation with eschatological absolutism and ʿAlid formulas brought these concepts into mainstream Timurid politics. Shāhrukh realized in which direction the pendulum was swinging, and he gradually abandoned his conservative policy and started to court a similar form of absolutist ideology. Soon after Mīrzā Iskandar died, Jalāl al-Dīn Qāyinī (d. 838/1434–35) wrote an elaborate political treatise entitled the *Naṣāʾiḥ-i Shāhrukhī*, in which he declared Shāhrukh to be the *mujaddid*, the promised renewer of religion.[71] Once again, the religious had turned political, and the political religious.

In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals used the political vocabulary which was first codified in this particular context by the Timurids, but more importantly they also inherited the ambiguity of this fifteenth century political discourse and tried to resolve the tension inherent therein by supplying its natural corollary—the concept of the universal empire. First Mīrzā Iskandar and then Shāhrukh in the first half of the fifteenth century were aware of the philosophical and theological components of the constitutional crisis raging through the Islamicate world, but they lacked the resources and will to pursue the ideal of a universal empire. It was under the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals that these aspirations were finally realized, albeit with different means, appropriate to their own time and place.[72]

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[71] Qāyinī, *Naṣāyikh-i Shāhrukhī* f. 3a; Subtelny and Khalidov, The Curriculum 212.

[72] The classic study on the sixteenth century eschatological absolutism is Fleischer, The Lawgiver as Messiah 159–177, and most recently *idem*, Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences 232–243. See also Subrahmanyam, Turning the Stones Over 135–154; Moin, *Islam and the Millenium* 55–240.

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Abbreviations

HAB: Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū: *Zubdat al-tawārīkh*, 4 vols., Jawādī, K.Ḥ.S. (ed.), Tehran 1380 H.sh./2001–02.

HAJ: Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū: *Jughrāfiyā-yi Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū*, 3 vols., Sajjādī, Ṣ. (ed.), Tehran 1375–78 H.sh./1996–1999.

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SMS: Samarqandī, Kamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq: *Maṭlaʿ-i Saʿdayn wa majmaʿ-i baḥrayn*, 2 vols. in 4 parts, Tehran 1383 H.sh./2004–05.

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Online Resources

www.zeno.ru Oriental Coins Database

PART THREE

FROM MYSTICISM AND MESSIANISM TO CHARISMATIC KINGSHIP: OTTOMANS, SAFAVIDS AND MUGHALS

L'IDÉOLOGIE D'ETAT CONCURRENCÉE PAR SON INTERPRÉTATION : LES MELĀMĪ-HAMZEVĪ DANS L'EMPIRE OTTOMAN

Paul Ballanfat

Toute communauté politique produit ses formes d'organisation par lesquelles il fait système. Cette organisation le constitue à la fois comme organisme et organon et nécessite un principe par lequel cette communauté politique peut valoir comme système. Les fondateurs de l'empire ottoman ont très tôt reconnu cette nécessité en marquant clairement la division entre la première période de fondation, celle de la conquête d'une capitale, Bursa, et la poursuite du développement de l'empire qui imposa plus tard la substitution de Constantinople, la capitale de l'empire romain d'Orient, à Bursa qui ne pouvait pas être à la mesure de l'empire. Cette division entre la première violence de la fondation et la croissance de l'empire constitue l'élément par lequel on peut apercevoir le principe d'organisation de l'empire. On est, bien évidemment, contraint de laisser de côté un grand nombre de détails qui pourraient nuancer le propos. Il n'en demeure pas moins que le passage de la fondation à la constitution d'un système organisé fut marqué par une rupture avec les conditions du début qui furent, de ce fait, reléguées en deçà de l'empire proprement dit. Cette rupture fut opérée par la formation d'un corps des clercs, au sens large, regroupant l'ensemble de ceux qui sont commis à l'entretien de ce qui, dès lors, peut être désigné comme secteur religieux. La répartition en secteurs d'activités est, du reste, elle-même, une nécessité du système politique qui se présente ainsi comme système où s'impose une organisation entre des parties soigneusement délimitées. En d'autres termes l'empire ottoman ne pouvait être tel qu'en répartissant en son sein un certain nombre de secteurs en leur conférant une place précise et des délimitations claires. Le système se produit en établissant des sous-systèmes qui lui sont internes. Le secteur religieux fut donc strictement délimité. Pour cela il fallait en finir d'une façon ou d'une autre avec tout ce qui, dans les pratiques et les croyances religieuses, ne permettait pas de poser des limites claires à un nouveau secteur, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble du domaine spirituel non affilié à l'Etat, voire hostiles à l'établissement politique d'une communauté. Or cette hostilité avait pendant longtemps été portée par ce que l'on appelle trop rapidement le Soufisme. Pour le dire brièvement,

l'empire devait pour se constituer comme tel poser de manière stricte un secteur religieux, et il fallait pour cela l'affranchir de toutes les tendances religieuses qui l'empêchent de se délimiter à l'intérieur du système politique. Autrement dit, l'empire avait besoin d'une instance de légitimation qui puisse fonder sa valeur, et pour cela il fallait constituer un secteur religieux qui était soumis à l'injonction politique de lui donner une caution.

Ce système de justification présente un double aspect. D'une part il doit être soumis à l'instance politique qu'il justifie. De ce point de vue il ne peut qu'être établi par ce qu'il doit pourtant justifier à l'avance. La justification est donc rétroactive et consacre de manière étrange la souveraineté de l'empereur sur le processus de légitimation qu'il a lui-même désigné. D'un autre côté, le religieux qui légitime le pouvoir politique doit, pour se faire, pouvoir arguer de son antécédence sur l'établissement du système politique, antécédence par laquelle il déborde celui-ci et donne autorité à sa décision de le légitimer. Le contrôle du religieux est donc un enjeu essentiel à la formation de l'empire. Il doit donc être très strictement encadré et défini, ce qui suppose que l'on en oblitère toute la charge qui déborde et échappe au politique. Les frontières du religieux étaient floues du fait de la grande diversité religieuse régnant en Anatolie. L'Etat avait affaire à un vaste domaine religieux et spirituel qui échappait à son contrôle, qui pouvait bien sûr à l'occasion lui apporter son aide mais toujours à sa propre initiative[1]. D'un côté donc il s'agissait de mettre de l'ordre dans ce domaine en limitant l'indépendance de ceux qui dans le religieux ne se soumettent pas volontiers à la tutelle de l'Etat et qui, de plus, contestent aux clercs leur prédominance, au nom précisément de la spiritualité dans laquelle est censé se fonder le religieux. Il fallait mettre au pas l'ensemble très informel des spirituels, même si ceux-là ne manifestaient pas d'opposition directe à l'empire et à sa politique. D'un autre côté, l'empire était contesté du point de vue de sa fondation par les divers éléments plus ou moins rattachés au Shīʿisme en Anatolie, et qui là, au moins, pouvaient représenter une alternative politique claire. La situation était différente dans les deux cas. Dans le second cas, la question ne pouvait se régler que par la guerre à la fois interne et, plus tard, externe contre le grand voisin iranien. Dans le premier cas, la manœuvre consistait simplement

[1] C'est encore le cas à l'extrême fin du dix-septième siècle lorsque l'empereur décide de renvoyer en prison à Limni le mystique Niyāzī Miṣrī (1618–1694) qui avait décidé de son propre chef de venir participer à l'attaque contre l'Autriche. Le problème ici est encore le caractère incontrôlable d'un mystique qui ne respecte donc pas les frontières du secteur religieux telles que l'Etat les trace. Sur ce point, Ballanfat, *Messianisme* 97–101.

à déplacer la frontière qui délimitait traditionnellement le spirituel du politique. En d'autres termes, la position des spirituels, selon laquelle, le politique est une menace pour la spiritualité et selon laquelle les spirituels doivent se tenir à l'écart de la politique autant que faire se peut, n'était plus tenable. En tout cas, la formation de l'empire – on serait tenté de dire moderne – ne permettait pas de maintenir un tel hiatus, car il y allait de la possibilité même de la formation d'un système impérial, lequel réclame une légitimité de nature religieuse. Le secteur religieux à constituer ne pouvait donc pas laisser à l'extérieur cet immense domaine aux limites non définies que l'on peut qualifier sommairement de spirituel. La frontière devait donc non plus passer entre spirituel et politique. Dès lors que le religieux devenait un secteur du système politique, il fallait intégrer le spirituel à l'intérieur du religieux. La manœuvre fut donc de transformer les « spirituels » en « mystiques », et je proposerai de garder ces deux termes ainsi : le spirituel en tant qu'il n'est pas intégré au secteur religieux et donc externe au système politique ; le mystique en tant que ce spirituel qui s'est intégré au secteur religieux avec lequel il travaille à fournir sa légitimité au système politique. La frontière était déplacée de façon à constituer un secteur du religieux diversifié mais organisé. Dorénavant, le système politique ne pouvait plus laisser à l'extérieur un vaste domaine non contrôlé. Pour se réaliser il devait intégrer le religieux en lui donnant une définition et une forme. Ce religieux était donc divisé en deux grandes parties communiquant l'une avec l'autre, le corps des ulémas et l'ensemble des confréries soufies ou apparentées, les *ṭarīqāt*. La frontière passerait maintenant à l'intérieur du champ spirituel et non plus à l'extérieur, frontière délimitant spirituel et mystique.

Les mystiques étaient donc ceux qui étaient organisés en confréries, et la manière dont l'Etat intégrait les spirituels dans le secteur religieux consistait précisément à les soumettre à la tutelle d'organisations mystiques elles-mêmes liées de multiples façons au corps des ulémas. Le développement spectaculaire des confréries à l'époque ottomane n'est pas dû au hasard. Il est directement lié à l'assimilation du spirituel au religieux par sa conversion à la mystique. On a souvent souligné à quel point les clercs et les mystiques furent proches durant l'empire ottoman, combien de clercs étaient aussi affiliés à des confréries, comme d'ailleurs le Sulṭān, même si parfois des conflits éclataient entre ces instances, mais toujours à l'intérieur du même secteur et régulés par l'organisation interne de ce secteur en dernière instance. Aux ulémas la régulation juridique du système, aux mystiques sa légitimité fondée religieusement. En somme cette intégration était aussi l'intégration du dieu des spirituels au dieu des religieux.

La division entre les deux pouvait s'exprimer calmement sous la forme d'une distinction entre voie et loi dans laquelle la loi demeurait toujours la condition de la voie, celle-ci n'étant que la poursuite de la loi sous une autre forme et s'achevant dans l'affirmation du retour à la loi. Les conflits cachaient un consensus profond et définitif du point de vue mystique sur le rapport entre la voie mystique et la loi. Ce consensus devint une banalité de tout discours mystique ou mystico-religieux. Il sembla donc bien qu'on en avait fini avec l'antagonisme entre le spirituel et le politico-religieux, et que seul l'empire ottoman finalement avait réussi ce tour de force. Dès lors que l'on était membre d'une confrérie on ne pouvait plus échapper au système politico-religieux dans son ensemble. Etre mystique consistait précisément à apporter une légitimité au système impérial par la simple participation à un système confrérique cautionné, installé et rémunéré par l'Etat[2]. Cependant ce déplacement des frontières qui rendait possible l'arrimage du spirituel au politique, nécessité par la loi du système, supposait aussi de mettre le spirituel en conflit avec lui-même. La distinction entre spirituel et mystique venait jouer à l'intérieur même du spirituel et révélait du même coup des antagonismes très profonds déjà présents dès la fondation de la cité musulmane, même sous sa forme purement juridique[3]. Ces antagonismes étaient apparus de manière très crues avec l'exécution de Ḥallāj en 309/922, et de nombreux spirituels retraçaient régulièrement la longue litanie des spirituels exécutés par les divers pouvoirs politiques[4] toujours sous des motifs religieux qui cachaient mal, non pas qu'ils couvraient des motifs politiques, mais qu'ils masquaient le fait que le religieux et le politique sont toujours imbriqués l'un dans l'autre et inséparables. Cet antagonisme fut aussi articulé théologiquement et des fractures nombreuses se firent jour dans les prises de position des spirituels à l'égard de Ḥallāj, comme l'avait montré Louis Massignon. Dans tous les cas, le problème concernait la décision de dire ou de taire un certain nombre d'enseignements ou d'expériences spirituelles, c'est-à-dire le problème de la reconnaissance et du traçage des frontières du spirituel et du politico-religieux. La violence de celui-ci s'en trouvait justifiée

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[2] Certains tentaient d'y résister en refusant les dons comme Üftāde (1490–1580). Mais il finit par tomber victime d'un de ces dons qu'un de ses disciples eut la naïveté d'accepter, Ballanfat, *Nightingale*, 3–6.

[3] Témoin ce verset coranique très clair qui condamne la tentation de Muḥammad de soumettre le spirituel à l'ordre juridico-politique : « *N'expulse pas ceux qui prient le matin et le soir leur Seigneur : ils désirent Sa Face. Leur compte ne t'incombe pas, et ton compte ne leur incombe en rien. Les expulserais-tu que tu serais parmi les injustes* », Q 6:52.

[4] Par exemple Rūzbihān, *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt* 23–27.

et légitimée quand bien même elle était considérée injuste. Le thème de l'injustice légitime du système politico-religieux partageait le monde spirituel, comme le partageait depuis longtemps la division classique et arbitraire posée par Hujwīrī (5e /11e siècle) entre ivresse et sobriété. Arbitraire, elle l'était dans la perspective du temps où écrivait Hujwīrī. Elle anticipait extraordinairement sur des antagonismes qui allaient répéter cette distinction employée alors pour des raisons didactiques et taxinomiques. Cet antagonisme pouvait dès lors s'autoriser de ces divergences d'opinion sur le droit à prendre la parole pour réinterpréter l'opposition juridico-religieuse entre musulman fidèle et libertin (*zindīq*), antinomiste (*mulḥid*). Le déplacement des frontières qui avait permis de redéfinir de manière stricte le religieux à partir et sous la condition du politique ouvrait un autre déplacement, ou plutôt une substitution, mais qui avait été préparée par la distinction de Hujwīrī et le cas de Ḥallāj. La figure du libertin et de l'antinomiste pourrait ainsi dorénavant être transférée au spirituel. Il ne s'agirait plus de distinguer le vrai musulman du non-musulman ou du faux musulman, car ce problème était en quelque sorte dépassé. C'est dorénavant en vertu de la frontière qui divise le mystique du spirituel que ce vocabulaire pourrait être utilisé. Le mystique doit s'affirmer comme seul tenant de la spiritualité. Pour ce faire on pourra déplacer la frontière libertin/croyant pour distinguer le vrai spirituel du faux. Le vrai spirituel est le mystique. Le critère est le respect de la loi puisque la condition de la voie est la loi. Le mystique est le seul spirituel car il est le seul à se tenir dans la stricte orthodoxie, le seul à s'en tenir à la stricte ortholexie que définit le religieux. Sa parole demeure inscrite dans le cadre du secteur religieux et ce qui le met à l'épreuve n'est autre que la légitimité qu'il renouvelle à la fois pour le système politique et pour le secteur religieux. L'ortholexie, c'est-à-dire le fait de s'en tenir à la parole religieusement délimitée, est ce qui confirme sa valeur spirituelle. La parole est mystique dans la mesure où elle s'inscrit parfaitement dans le cadre fixé à l'avance de tout exercice de la parole : cadre institutionnel de la confrérie dont l'espace est le couvent, lui-même attribué à telle ou telle confrérie en fonction des nécessités politiques[5] ; et cadre performatif de l'élocution, de la *lexis* proprement

[5] On voit ainsi à partir du milieu du dix-neuvième siècle brutalement le nombre des couvents halvetis diminuer drastiquement et celui des couvents Naqshbandīs croître en même proportion. Ce qui s'explique par le fait que le Sulṭān réaffecta les couvents halvetis aux Naqshbandīs qui s'avéraient plus utiles à la politique de l'empire.

dite, le cours (*ders*) qui vient se substituer à la conversation (*sohbet*)[6] et le réinterprète, et le prêche (*vaʿz, hutbe*) à la mosquée où de nombreux maîtres de confréries sont appointés. L'ortholexie se double donc d'une orthopraxie. La mystique ne consiste pas simplement dans l'exercice de la parole mais aussi dans la promotion de pratiques religieuses et morales qui sont fixées par les clercs qui gèrent l'organisation juridique de la société et qui sont rassemblées sous un vocable unique, celui de La Loi (*sharīʿa*).

Les mystiques sont donc les uniques représentants de la spiritualité parce qu'ils sont les seuls à respecter le droit qui règle l'usage de la parole. Brièvement dit, la parole spirituelle est donc soumise à la loi religieuse qui en limite l'usage et l'expression et ainsi établit strictement ce que la parole peut dire. Le point décisif ici est que la parole doit être contrôlée. Le contrôle n'est possible que dans la mesure où la parole peut être attribuée strictement à un auteur qui est présumé en avoir le contrôle. Il ne peut y avoir de constitution d'un secteur religieux et d'une région mystique dans ce secteur que dans la mesure où la parole peut être effectivement contrôlée par ce secteur et qu'elle lui est imputable. C'est l'enjeu de distinctions importantes et anciennes dans la spiritualité, d'une part la division entre inspiration (*ilhām*) et révélation (*waḥy*) et d'autre part l'immense question du paradoxe extatique (*shaṭḥ*)[7]. Pour en tracer très rapidement quelques éléments utiles à la suite de mo propos, rappelons que la révélation est définie dans le cadre mystico-religieux comme un privilège prophétique à double titre : le mode par lequel le prophète reçoit la parole de Dieu et par lequel il est choisi pour être prophète ; la contenu même de la révélation, essentiellement le Coran et accessoirement ce que l'on appelle *ḥadīth qudsī*, et qui n'a pas le même statut. Le propre de la révélation est qu'elle est arbitraire, unilatérale, incontestable et inconditionnelle. L'inspiration est une sorte d'ombre de la révélation, son fantôme en quelque sorte. Elle lui ressemble mais en est à une distance telle qu'elle reproduit la différence absolue entre le prophète et les autres hommes. Elle dépend de la préparation de celui qui la reçoit, c'est-à-dire de la qualité de sa formation spirituelle. Elle est donc conditionnée, multilatérale, douteuse et dialectique. La distinction entre ces deux types

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[6] Le cours est unilatéral, ou magistral, la conversation se fait à plusieurs voix et suppose questions, réponses, objections. Le terme de *sohbet* est vidé de son sens ancien de conversation et de compagnonnage pour désigner simplement le fait d'être affilié à un maître dont on reçoit une formation au moyen du cours.

[7] Ernst, *Words* ; Ballanfat, Interprétations; Le paradoxe.

de paroles apparentées, car toutes deux venues du dehors, joue dans l'analyse du paradoxe extatique, et jouerait aussi d'ailleurs dans le problème du rêve. Que Rūzbihān, par exemple, assimile le Coran au paradoxe n'est pas un hasard[8]. La distinction entre *ilhām* et *waḥy* est aussi, du point de vue spirituel, sujette à caution, et il ne manque pas de spirituels pour faire vaciller cette frontière[9] apparemment si bien fondée et incontestable dans le dispositif rhétorique religieux. Là encore, il faut le signaler, le mystique vient au secours du religieux en répétant ces frontières. Le discours d'un Rūzbihān sur le *shaṭḥ* est le plus achevé et le plus élaboré[10]. C'est qu'il en est le dernier grand avocat. Immédiatement après lui, le paradoxe extatique se voit dévalué et violemment critiqué, aboutissant à son éviction du discours mystique qui lui oppose la science (*'ilm*). On se trouve devant une série d'oppositions qui vont servir à bien marquer l'antagonisme interne au spirituel entre mystiques et spirituels : ivresse/sobriété ; révélation/inspiration ; paradoxe/science ; ordre/désordre, etc. L'enjeu est la maîtrise de la parole. Celle-ci doit pouvoir être imputable à quelqu'un qui peut donc en répondre et se trouve du même coup soumis à l'avance, avant toute prise de parole, à la condition de la Loi. C'est la parole en tant que telle qui doit par avance être conditionnée par la Loi et doit impérativement être préservée de tout débordement. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une mesure juridique ou administrative, même si c'est bien sous le coup de la juridiction religieuse que la parole est placée et fait courir le risque de la condamnation. C'est la parole elle-même qui est soustraite à son propre débordement. En d'autres termes il s'agit d'une juridiction interne à la parole qui de l'intérieur ou dans son intérieur oblitère dans la parole elle-même la possibilité qu'elle se dise d'elle-même, qu'elle se déborde elle-même. La parole est ainsi réduite à ce qui en elle est susceptible de tomber sous le coup de la loi. Ce que les spirituels anciens considéraient comme la possibilité de toute parole, à savoir que dans la parole celle-ci puisse se libérer de son locuteur qui en devient du même coup le témoin ou l'auditeur, s'en trouve expulsé. La parole devient dès lors mystique, sous le contrôle du maître, qui est maître précisément parce qu'il en a la maîtrise. Le rejet du paradoxe joue un rôle essentiel dans le dispositif

[8] Ballanfat, *Le dévoilement* 49–51, 102–106.

[9] Niyāzī Miṣrī par exemple emploie à de nombreuses reprises le terme de *waḥy* pour désigner ses inspirations, de même qu'il désigne Hasan et Huseyn comme prophètes (*nabī*), et emploie le terme de *peyghamber* pour lui-même, Ballanfat, *Messianisme* 57–8, 139, 201–2.

[10] Ballanfat, Interprétations ; Le paradoxe.

par lequel la spiritualité est muée en mystique et inscrite dans le cadre juridique du système politico-religieux. La parole s'en trouve neutralisée en même temps qu'est rehaussée la figure du prophète qui est le seul à bénéficier de cette parole qui devient véritablement exceptionnelle.

C'est sur la base de cette élaboration politique que l'on peut commencer à envisager le problème singulier que pose le courant Melāmī dans l'empire ottoman. Mais loin que l'analyse politique permette de l'appréhender, c'est plutôt ce courant lui-même qui permet de se retourner sur le politique et sa position comme objet d'analyse. Il n'a que très peu été étudié, et le plus souvent du point de vue exclusivement historique, politique, voire du point de vue de l'anthropologie religieuse. La seule étude d'ensemble digne de ce nom est la monographie d'Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı[11]. Ces perspectives ne sont pas à négliger et apportent des contributions utiles à l'établissement des faits historiques. Mais elles manquent nécessairement toujours l'objet qu'elles visent, et cela pour une raison qui est au principe de ce mouvement. Il se définit lui-même comme indéfini. En d'autres termes sa position singulière en tant que mouvement dans le monde spirituel ottoman est précisément qu'il se refuse à toute objectivation et multiplie les précautions pour empêcher toute élaboration qui le réinscrirait à l'intérieur d'un système d'interprétation préalable. On peut se douter aussi que ce courant ne permette pas de l'aborder en termes de norme. Le propre de toute norme est de cacher son caractère de norme derrière des procédures politiques, sociales, idéologiques. La norme ne se présente pas en tant que telle. Elle ne paraît au contraire que lorsqu'elle est accusée par ceux qui la contestent. Toujours au nom d'une autre norme. Et ce n'est que dans la mesure où l'on peut décider d'une normativité d'un phénomène qu'il est possible de le poser comme objet. Or les Melāmīs s'attachent précisément à défaire tout ce qui pourrait constituer une norme. A moins de faire de cette défection une norme, mais désespérément vide, on ne voit pas comment on pourrait les placer dans les catégories que la sociologie religieuse a héritées de l'hérésiographie religieuse. Ce courant exhibe au contraire le système de la normativité lui-même, et ceci sans en contester la validité. En d'autres termes, ce qui est particulièrement intéressant c'est que les Melāmīs n'adoptent pas l'attitude attendue de « l'hérétique » qui

[11] *Melâmilik ve Melâmiler*. Les ouvrages récents ne font que reprendre, souvent mal, les éléments de cet ouvrage. Les études d'anthropologie religieuse ont de leur côté l'inconvénient immense de ne pas pouvoir se mettre en position d'écouter la pensée des interprètes de ce courant, ce qui conduit à de graves erreurs d'interprétation de ses questions fondamentales.

manifesterait par ces comportements et ces propos son opposition à la norme majoritaire, son désaccord ou tout simplement le fait qu'il refuse de s'y soumettre. Ils s'en tiennent à la pratique de la norme majoritaire. Ils insistent tous sur le respect scrupuleux de la Loi, et parfois semblent même en rajouter[12]. C'est en menant une vie tout à fait commune, fondue dans la norme, qu'Idrīs-i Muhtefī put échapper à la police durant tout le temps qu'il fut le pôle melāmī. Laʿlīzāde rapporte un entretien significatif qu'Idrīs eut avec un de ses voisins et amis qui lui déclare : « Une personne du nom d'Idrīs-i Muhtefī égarée et qui abuse les autres, un individu atypique parfaitement hérétique et antinomiste dont l'impiété et l'égarement nécessitent qu'on l'éradique à la racine, est apparu. Combien d'honnêtes musulmans n'a-t-il pas précipités dans la vallée de l'erreur. Il a rassemblé autour de lui un très grand nombre d'hommes esclaves de leurs passions. Ça fait un bon moment que nous sommes assoiffés de voir couler une goutte de son sang. On n'arrive pas à mettre la main sur lui »[13]. S'il ne peut faire le lien entre le personnage de la rumeur et celui qui est en face de lui, c'est qu'Idrīs précisément adopte une attitude en tous points orthodoxe. Néanmoins, la compréhension que les Melāmīs ont de la loi est aux antipodes de celle des clercs et des mystiques. Pīr ʿAlī Aksarāyī ne dit pas que ses actes sont soumis à la loi, comme on le lirait trop vite, mais qu'ils sont la loi. En bref, cette affirmation renverse le système de la loi puisqu'il ne s'agit plus de soumettre ses actes à la norme préalable de la loi, mais au contraire de considérer ses actes eux-mêmes comme la loi, qui seulement alors peut être dite proprement muhammadienne en ce qu'elle ne produit pas de norme et n'est pas soumise à une norme mais se norme elle-même à chaque acte. De même l'interprétation par laquelle Oğlan Şeyh Ibrāhīm subvertit une métaphore banale dans le soufisme est particulièrement audacieuse : « La réalité est le noyau, la Loi est

[12] Entre autres exemples cet extrait d'un long poème d'Oğlan Şeyh Ibrāhīm : « Qui est déficient à l'égard de la loi, Son affaire n'a pas lieu dans les deux mondes. Il est malade celui-là aux yeux de tous. Nul ne peut croire ces promesses. Car s'il a un défaut dans la loi, il aura beau s'y remettre mille fois, il ne réussira pas. Il faut donner un remède à ce malheureux. Car à toi il s'est confié. Son remède est la prescription du licite et la proscription de l'interdit », *Külliyāt* 197 ; de même lorsque Lebenî Beşīr Ağa demande à être initié, on lui dit : « On ne peut atteindre la voie sans passer par la Loi », Tek, *Müstakimzāde* 132 ; de même Pīr ʿAlī Aksarāyī déclare : « La Loi c'est nos actes, la Voie c'est nos paroles, la Vérité c'est notre état, la Connaissance mystique c'est le sommet de ce que nous savons », ou encore : « La Loi est le sous-vêtement des saints, la Voie est la robe des saints, la Vérité est leur condition et la Connaissance mystique est l'essentiel de ce qu'ils possèdent », Erünsal, *Kaynaklar* 193.

[13] Tek, *Müstakimzāde* 97.

la coquille externe : brise-la et sors-en le noyau. Par une allusion, je t'ai donné à connaître ce secret, insensé »[14]. C'est ainsi la normativité en tant qu'elle implique toujours un rapport mimétique entre la loi et ce qu'elle se soumet et qui repose en fin de compte sur une ontologie eidétique qui est radicalement remise en compte. Et pour cause puisque c'est justement l'ontologie avec son schématisme qui doit être défaite pour ouvrir la voie à la pensée telle que l'envisage le courant melāmī. On ne peut donc l'aborder selon ces catégories puisque celles-ci sont dénoncées en permanence, ou encore désignées dans leur insuffisance. Nous sommes ainsi placés devant une impossibilité. Celle d'aborder ce courant du point de vue de l'anthropologie religieuse comme de la simple analyse politique. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que nous ne pouvons pas nous y risquer. Mais, si nous passons outre à cet avertissement, nous passons tout simplement à côté de l'originalité de ce courant. Il nous force en quelque sorte à le considérer exclusivement du point de vue de la pensée dans tout ce qu'elle peut avoir de troublant pour les catégories scientifiques.

La particularité de ce courant est précisément qu'il n'est pas une confrérie et qu'il n'en reprend aucune caractéristique. C'est pourquoi je me contente de le désigner comme courant, et même pas comme mouvement. S'il a une certaine organisation c'est uniquement eu égard aux nécessités de la pensée en tant qu'elle se partage et se transmet. Les Melāmīs n'ont ni nom, ni structure, ni couvent, ni rites, ni véritable hiérarchie – j'y reviendrai. Ou plutôt ce qui les caractérise c'est précisément le refus de la confrérie et de ses signes, comme le refus de se désigner d'un nom. Cette attitude prend sa source au moment de la succession du saint d'Ankara, Hacı Bayrām Velī (m. 832/1429) d'où sont nées à la fois des confréries et ce que l'on peut qualifier d'« anti-confrérie » melāmīe. Lors de l'agonie du maître, deux de ses disciples étaient susceptibles de lui succéder, Muḥammad b. Ḥamza Akşemseddīn (m. 864/1459) et Dede Ömer Sikkīnī (m. 880/1475). On ne peut s'étendre sur le problème crucial pourtant des querelles fratricides qu'occasionne toute succession. L'important ici est que du fait de cette succession on assista à la naissance de deux branches, l'une étant une confrérie classique, respectivement la Şemsiyye-i Bayrāmiyye et la Melāmiyye-i Bayrāmiyye. Celle-ci rassemblée autour d'Ömer Sikkīnī se caractérisa immédiatement par l'opposition au système confrérique. En somme ces deux branches consistaient en une

[14] *Külliyāt*, 239. Pour toutes ces questions je ne peux que renvoyer à mon ouvrage en cours d'édition qui les développe abondamment, *Le messianisme de l'unité*.

confrérie et son négatif. Au cours d'une fameuse réunion, Ömer Sikkīnī fit brûler tous les signes par lesquelles les derviches font connaître leur appartenance, turbans et manteaux. Les Melāmīs se distinguèrent donc des soufis en choisissant de ne se distinguer de personne, comme le résume Pīr ʿAlī Aksarāyī : « Les gens d'Allāh sont sortis des turbans et des manteaux. Ils ont choisi d'avoir la même apparence que les gens normaux. Vous aussi, ne changez pas de vêtements, disait-il. Le Prince du royaume de la signification était un gnostique, mais il marchait au milieu des gens sans s'en distinguer. Quiconque voyait son aspect extérieur ne pouvait rien remarquer. À notre époque, les gens sont idolâtres des formes »[15]. Le courant se pose d'emblée comme radicalement critique. Il décompose ainsi la distinction mystique en s'en démarquant. Démarque de la démarque, double torsion qui ne consiste pas à rejoindre la masse des croyants contre les mystiques, mais à se distinguer plus radicalement encore en aggravant la démarque. Il s'agit encore d'une question de frontière. Le soufisme se démarque de la masse en traçant une frontière clairement reconnaissable en tant que frontière car elle est rendue visible par des signes matériels. Les Melāmīs inscrivent une autre frontière dont la caractéristique est précisément de n'avoir aucune visibilité, une frontière qui l'est d'autant plus qu'elle est effacée. C'est le geste d'effacer la frontière qui tient dorénavant lieu de frontière. Le Melāmī est celui qui se retire de toute visibilité, ou mieux encore : celui qui retire son privilège à la visibilité ; à toute visibilité, car il ne s'agit pas ici d'opposer la visibilité du monde caché par exemple à la visibilité du sensible. A ce compte on reproduirait le schéma bien connu du soufisme. Le geste est absolument critique. Il est souligné par Laʿlīzāde, le même chroniqueur, qui n'a d'ailleurs pas le niveau spirituel de la maîtrise, qui rapporte comment et pourquoi la spiritualité avait du quitter la Perse pour l'Anatolie au quatorzième siècle[16]. Le passage dans lequel Laʿlīzāde rend compte de la division est précieux et mérite d'être cité *in extenso* : « Ils brûlèrent turban et froc

[15] Erünsal, *Kaynaklar* 194–5.

[16] Il rapporte que ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ardabīlī dit un jour à Hamīd al-Dīn Aksarāyī, le maître de Hacı Bayrām Velī : « Ô mon enfant, sois doué du charisme de la bonne guidance, sois la trace de la conscience illuminée par le miroir rayonnant de beauté de sorte que, par la volonté de Dieu, le soleil de la sainteté qui s'est levé sur la tour du pays des Iraniens (*ʿajam*) la quitte et se transporte sur la tour du pays des Grecs (*Rūm*). Il n'y a plus dans notre contrée un seul homme au cœur pur, capable et digne de porter ce dépôt des plus grands hommes. C'est pourquoi, ô soleil du ciel de la sainteté, il faut dès à présent que tu sois le rayon qui diffuse la lumière de la vérité en partant joyeusement en direction du pays des Grecs (*Rūm*) », *Sergüzeşt* 59–61 ; le récit est donné aussi mais plus sobrement par ʿAbdürrahmān el-Askerī, Erünsal, *Kaynaklar* 200.

dans le feu de l'amour et du ravissement et ils choisirent le vêtement des gens ordinaires. Après cet événement, les disciples de cette voie ne changèrent pas ce style pour une autre sorte de vêtement. Pour les derviches melāmī il n'y a pas de vêtement spécifique. Akşemseddīn regretta ce qu'il avait fait et en demanda pardon. Emīr Sikkīnī accepta ses excuses. Il demeura à Göynük jusqu'à la fin de sa vie. Mais, après ce douloureux événement, les gens de la voie se divisèrent en deux parties. Une partie est constituée des gnostiques qui connaissent la sincérité [de ces deux personnes] conformément à ce qui a été écrit et savent que ce genre de querelles abondent entre les amis de Dieu (*evliyāʾüllāh*) et qu'elles n'empêchent pas la sainteté. Ils ont de l'amour pour ces deux nobles personnages et en ont une bonne et solide opinion. L'autre partie répand toutes sortes de mensonges, de calomnies, de reproches et d'insanités sur le compte des derviches qui appartiennent à cette voie jusqu'à aujourd'hui, à cause de leur ressentiment et de leur haine envers Emīr Sikkīnī. La persécution et le blâme jetés sur les hommes de cette voie sont une habitude parmi les gens depuis l'époque de l'envoyé de Dieu »[17]. Le récit conclut la confrontation entre Ömer Sikkīnī et Akşemseddīn venu le voir pour lui interdire de diriger des disciples. Il décrit de nouveau le geste de la destruction des signes distinctifs du soufisme par les Melāmīs. Mais surtout il établit de manière stricte le rapport entre le courant melāmī et les confréries mystiques en fixant la position melāmī. Il convient de s'y arrêter, même si, encore une fois, Laʿlīzāde est un chroniqueur initié à l'enseignement melāmī mais n'en est de toute évidence pas un maître. D'une part il établit la légitimité des deux acteurs de la confrontation, tous deux désignés comme saints – il ne faut toutefois pas se laisser abuser par la catégorie de la sainteté utilisée ici car elle est diverse et regroupe des personnes de niveaux très différents. L'important est tout de même que Laʿlīzāde réaffirme la légitimité des deux parties, c'est-à-dire des Melāmīs bien sûr, mais aussi, il faut y prendre garde, de l'ensemble des confréries soufies sous le couvert de cette confrérie particulière désignée ici. Le deuxième étage du dispositif est que la légitimité des confréries inclut leur condamnation de la Melāmiyye. En d'autres termes, le courant melāmī est non seulement l'instance ou plutôt le geste qui met en crise l'institution soufie en ce qu'elle a de mystique, mais en plus par ce geste elle se pose comme le négatif de la mystique qui le désigne ainsi en le niant. Multiples retournements donc. Ce n'est que dans la mesure où le soufisme nie le courant

[17] Laʿlīzāde, *Sergüzeşt* 72–74.

melāmī, et ne peut par essence pas faire autrement, que ce courant est posé comme critique et donc comme négatif. Ainsi la position du courant melāmī n'est d'une certaine façon pas auto-instituée, elle est toujours le contrepoint de toute institution soufie. Pour renvoyer à un événement connu le consensus pour condamner Ḥallāj est ce qui pose Ḥallāj dans sa position singulière et nécessaire à l'institution soufie. Le négatif ne peut se poser lui-même comme tel. Il ne peut être tel que posé de l'extérieur, par ce mouvement qui le nie expressément. C'est ce qui se joue dans le nom même de Melāmī et de *melāmet* qui renvoie au Coran[18]. Le blâme est ce qui est adressé au Melāmī de l'extérieur. Il ne peut en aucun cas se nommer ainsi du fait même de la force de la signification du blâme qui est interprété ici comme négation. La négation suppose une extériorité qui en décide. Se nier soi-même ne peut jamais être qu'un simulacre de négation car elle suppose une affirmation préalable de ce qui est nié et l'affirmation de la négation elle-même. Autrement dit, si le dispositif de la négation, donc aussi de la persécution, et du déchainement de la violence la plus implacable contre les Melāmīs n'était pas mis en place contre eux et indépendamment d'eux, il n'y aurait pas de courant melāmī. Etre melāmī c'est se tenir dans cette étrange position décidée ailleurs pour en être le négatif avec tous les risques que cela induit. S'ils se désignaient eux-mêmes ainsi, ils perdraient leur position en se soumettant d'eux-mêmes à la normalité de la désignation. Ils ne sont pas victimes de leur position critique, de leur contestation d'une certaine norme majoritaire, d'un comportement hérétique ou de propos déviants. Ils n'apparaissent comme critique, comme négatif de l'institution mystique que parce que celle-ci en décide ainsi et ne peut pas faire autrement qu'en décider ainsi pour pouvoir se définir. La norme ne peut apparaître et se constituer que dans cette mesure, en désignant à la violence de la loi ce qui l'anéantit. Le négatif est donc ici non pas une autre norme, ou l'autre de la norme mais la ruine de la normalité de la norme. C'est en cela que les Melāmīs qui ne furent pourtant que de minuscules groupuscules sans ambition politique furent la victime d'une violence inouïe de la part de l'ensemble des institutions impériales, administrations politique, religieuse et mystique. C'est pourquoi aussi on aura beau chercher des explications conjoncturelles

[18] Q 5:54. Signalons que dans le *Coran*, celui qui se blâme est toujours celui qui est retourné contre lui-même par sa propre faute ; c'est tout le sens de l'injonction adressée par Satan aux hommes qui l'ont suivi, Q 14:22.

politiques, économiques, des soupçons d'insurrection, on ne pourra pas sérieusement justifier la répression dont ils furent victimes.

Le nom Melāmī est un nom dont les Melāmīs n'ont pas le droit de se désigner. Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'il n'y a pas parfois une certaine licence dans l'usage de cette règle. Mais c'est toujours dans la poésie qu'on la voit transgressée par ceux-là mêmes qui ne devraient pas s'en qualifier. Le nom Melāmī est un nom paradoxal. Les chroniqueurs n'indiquent pas pour quelle raison ce mouvement a repris ce nom ni même si eux-mêmes se sont consciemment rattachés ainsi au courant khurassanien des *ahl al-malāma*, les hommes du blâme, pour reprendre la belle expression de Roger Deladrière. Néanmoins, la manière dont Ibn al-ʿArabī décrit les hommes du blâme semble correspondre en tous points à ce courant dont l'enseignement, par ailleurs, était fondé exclusivement sur le motif par lequel on désigne sommairement l'essentiel de l'enseignement d'Ibn al-ʿArabī, la *waḥdat al-wujūd*, l'unité de l'existence. Ce motif n'est pas une caractéristique exclusive des Melāmīs à l'époque ottomane. Il est généralement partagé par l'ensemble des mystiques ottomans, voire au-delà, jusque chez certains clercs. Mais les Melāmīs présentent cette caractéristique que l'ensemble de leur enseignement, y compris leur position singulière, est fondée et orientée en permanence sur le motif de l'unité de l'existence, de sorte que cette unité ne peut se revendiquer que dans la mesure où elle unifie l'ensemble de la pensée. L'unité de l'existence n'est pas simplement un motif, une idée dans un système plus général, c'est, de leur point de vue, le nom qui désigne la possibilité de la pensée elle-même ou encore son instauration. Et ce n'est que dans la mesure où il s'agit là de la condition de la pensée que l'unité peut être dite unité de l'existence.

Ibn al-ʿArabī indique que les hommes du blâme portent le nom que Dieu leur a donné, « le Pauvre »[19]. Ils ne peuvent pas se désigner par eux-mêmes, et le nom « pauvre » qui leur est conféré désigne précisément du fait qu'il leur est donné cette pauvreté absolue qui ne peut pas même se désigner elle-même, c'est-à-dire s'attribuer quelque chose. Tout nom manifeste quelque chose, et un nom n'est rien d'autre que ce qui se manifeste en manifestant autre chose que lui-même, de sorte qu'un nom n'a pas de substance et est toujours occulté précisément du fait de son pouvoir manifestant, retiré dans ce qui le révèle. Le Pauvre est ce nom singulier qui ne manifeste rien d'autre que l'absence de toute manifestation. C'est donc le nom qui désigne le départ de tous les noms, le nom de ce qui se

[19] *Futūḥāt* 21, 19b–21a.

retire, ou encore le nom en tant qu'il se désigne en retrait. Signalons, par ailleurs que Sulamī dans son traité sur les hommes du blâme[20] indique que la pauvreté est un don de Dieu et que d'une part elle doit être tenue cachée et d'autre part on doit la laisser parler d'elle-même. La pauvreté désigne donc cet étrange don, le don même, qui ne contient rien, ou plutôt qui accorde le rien. Un don sans objet, sans contenu, qui ne consiste donc que dans le geste qui donne et constitue ainsi l'essence du don. Cette économie du don par lequel les hommes du blâme sont désignés repose sur l'opposition stricte entre pauvre et riche. La pauvreté est aussi ce don du dépouillement par lequel le nom Allāh se manifeste comme richesse totale dans la mesure où il est ce nom qui rassemble tous les noms. Ibn al-ʿArabī précise que les hommes du blâme ne sont pas pour autant pauvres. C'est la pauvreté qui leur est donnée. En bref, ce don c'est le fait de ne pas porter le nom riche, de manière à ce qu'il demeure la qualité du nom Allāh. Il y va pour les Melāmīs du fonctionnement de l'unité de l'existence, c'est-à-dire de l'unité en tant qu'elle s'existe. La pauvreté est donc le mode par lequel l'unité de Dieu paraît à la fois comme ce qui accorde le dépouillement de tout nom, et dans ce don même convoque « l'essence » (*dhāt*) dans sa différence avec ses attributs. La pauvreté est, en somme, l'économie de l'unité de l'existence.

Le nom qui qualifie les Melāmīs, par le simple fait qu'il est retourné contre eux et ne peut être que le don qui vient de l'extérieur, désigne cette pauvreté absolue qui constitue leur position sur le mode de l'absence, ou encore de l'effacement. Ce nom est le geste par lequel se manifeste l'effacement ou encore le retrait, c'est-à-dire le retrait de toute possibilité d'identification. Le Melāmī ne se manifeste pas en tant que tel, il lui est interdit de se désigner par ce nom et l'absence d'organisation confrérique, de rites, de pratiques spécifiques est la manifestation de l'impossibilité de la manifestation, ou encore l'interdit le plus radical de toute représentation et présentation. Il faut insister sur le fait que le nom est ici frappé d'un interdit particulier. Celui qui le porte ne peut s'en désigner lui-même. Ce qui est donc visé c'est la représentation, c'est-à-dire la tentation permanente de s'identifier donc de se représenter. C'est qu'en effet du point de vue melāmī l'unité de l'existence suppose la ruine de ce qui constitue ce que l'on prend pour le réel. Le dispositif de la présentation/représentation est le fondement de toute conception de la substance, c'est-à-dire de

[20] Je ne peux que renvoyer à sa traduction par Deladrière, *La lucidité implacable*, où l'on trouvera la liste exhaustive de tous les caractères des hommes du blâme.

l'ontologie. Or, on ne peut faire retour à l'existence, en tant qu'elle suppose l'unité, que dans la mesure où la substantialité des choses se dénonce. En d'autres termes, être melāmī suppose d'endurer la déception absolue de l'être que suppose l'existence. S'il faut passer par ce don c'est précisément que tout individu, toute unité, ce que l'on pourrait appeler une chose, se saisit toujours elle-même, se représente et, par conséquent, se substantialise. Ce mouvement de substantialisation est ce en quoi consiste toute chose. C'est aussi ce à quoi œuvrent les noms. Et il faudrait de ce point de vue aborder le problème, souligné dans les textes melāmīs comme chez Ibn al-ʿArabī, du fondement logique de toute ontologie. Disons rapidement sur ce point que le jeu de ce nom qui s'anéantit en tant que nom au moment même où il se donne, ouvre une voie vers ce problème. De ce point de vue, les Melāmīs considèrent dérisoire toute attaque sur leur moralité. C'est qu'en effet, comme ils le répètent, la loi, toute loi y compris scientifique, anthropologique et hérésiographique, ne peut que manquer ce qui se joue dans ce courant insaisissable. La loi nécessite des choses, des représentations, pour pouvoir évaluer, peser, mesurer. Bref elle a besoin d'un concept clair du réel qui repose sur la représentation et la substance pour pouvoir soumettre les choses à une mathématisation. Or les Melāmīs sont ceux qui de l'intérieur même de ce supposé réel constituent le dispositif de désubstantialisation de toute chose. Ils ne sont pas seulement ceux qui s'effacent. Ils effacent toute chose de leur effacement. Et ce dispositif est précisément ce qu'ils comprennent comme unité de l'existence, qui ne peut décidément pas être traduit comme unicité de l'être. Tout compte de l'immoralité supposée des Melāmīs est donc dérisoire par rapport à l'expérience de l'effacement qui suppose d'affronter en permanence la tentation identitaire en soi-même[21]. La faute dont les Melāmīs s'accusent est incomparable à toute faute. Ils y insistent. Elle est plus qu'une faute et échappe donc à tout calcul légal. Elle consiste dans le fait le plus simple, le plus élémentaire, le simple fait d'exister[22]. Cette

[21] C'est ce que rappelle avec force un poème de Lāmekānī, dont le nom désigne justement le non-lieu : « Comment l'unifié pourrait-il être conditionné par l'identité nationale ou religieuse ? Chacun de ses mouvements survient en tout lieu par l'essence de l'unité. On cherche en vérité par l'identité nationale et religieuse à connaître Dieu (*haqq*). Mais qu'a-t-elle à faire du multiple l'âme annihilée en Dieu (*Allâh*) ? L'unifié est affranchi et de l'infidélité et de la foi, et de l'association et de la révolte », Ilic, *Hüseyin* 150.

[22] D'autres que les Melāmīs se sont bien sûr tenus dans cette position. Du reste cette affirmation est très ancienne dans le Soufisme. Elle remonte au moins à Junayd qui la formule expressément et est répétée en particulier par les Kubrawīs. Mais on sait l'influence massive que la Kubrawiyya a eu sur l'ensemble du Soufisme ottoman. Najm al-dîn Kubrā répète ce propos ainsi : « ton existence est un péché auquel aucun autre péché ne peut

faute est celle qui constitue toute manifestation en tant que telle, ou le « en tant que tel » de tout apparaître. Elle est aussi du même coup la possibilité, offerte à la reconnaissance, de sa déception ou de sa défection. Et cette structure est la plus invisible qui soit. Elle ne cesse de s'effacer dans le réel. Le crime des Melāmīs du point de vue du dispositif politico-religieux est d'abord de la retracer de telle sorte qu'elle soit comme inévitable. C'est là ce que l'on peut désigner comme une apocalyptique ou un messianisme melāmī. Les mentions dont les Maîtres melāmīs se qualifient telles que : sans-lieu ou non-lieu (*lāmekānī*), non-temps (*lā-zemānī*), sans signe ou insigne (*bī-nişān*) résument clairement cette caractéristique de l'effacement, cette posture de la position impossible, voire de l'impossible même. Encore une fois, il s'agit plus d'une dynamique agonale qui joue à l'intérieur même de l'unité de l'existence qui est le risque qu'assument les Melāmīs et qui consiste dans le double mouvement simultané d'identification, dont il ne cesse de s'accuser, et de défection de l'identité, le don du rien par lequel Dieu l'envahit de son débordement. Ce n'est pas que le Melāmī est dans l'absence ou la non-présence, non-représentation. Il est celui dont la présentation est effacement, un mouvement et non une position. C'est en cela qu'il s'agit d'un courant qui ne cesse de couler dans le monde en faisant comparaître le monde, et se révèle d'autant plus menaçant qu'il n'a justement pas de position, pas de place, qu'il ne donne prise à aucune objectivation. Du coup il est nulle part où on pourrait lui assigner une place, et partout, en particulier où on ne le voudrait pas, où il ne cesse de décevoir l'attention qu'il surprend toujours.

On aura en tout cas compris que la violence dont les Melāmīs eurent à souffrir prend sa source dans la crise qu'ils suscitent au sein même du système politico-religieux. On a, à plusieurs reprises, voulu analyser la répression dont les Melāmīs furent victimes à partir des schémas offerts par les multiples révoltes qui eurent lieu en Anatolie sous l'empire ottoman et déjà durant la période seldjoukide. Le principe en est que la répression est par définition toujours une réponse à une insurrection préalable. Le schéma est clairement hérité du concept de révolution devenu central en politique depuis le dix-huitième siècle en Europe. Son application

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être comparé », *Eclosions* 64 ; *Pratique* 141. Lāmekānī dit par exemple : « Mon cœur, face au don de la présence au jour du rassemblement j'ai la face noire. Je suis un pécheur, je suis vil et j'ai un dieu (*ilāh*) dont la miséricorde abonde. Bien que je sois un serviteur en faute, j'ai un roi qui est tout de douceur. Si mes péchés sont nombreux, quelle douleur ? puisque j'ai un refuge comme lui. Mon existence est mon péché, c'est pourquoi je soupire chaque jour. Je ne discute jamais de mon existence pour me justifier, je commets des péchés », Ilic, *Hüseyin* 89.

mécanique est tout à fait contestable. Il l'est de manière évidente en ce qui concerne le courant melāmī. Certes, il y a eu des révoltes de type messianique en Anatolie dès la période seldjoukide[23], et il y a certainement dans ces révoltes des résurgences ou des héritages qui remontent aux grandes révoltes des groupuscules plus ou moins rattachables aux Shīʿismes qui commencèrent dès la période omeyyade. Mais, outre que de nombreux maître du soufisme ont critiqué très durement ces révoltes et leur dimension messianique, ils ont aussi attaqué violemment les interprétations politiques de la figure dédoublée du messie/Mahdī[24]. On peut s'attendre à ce que les Melāmīs adoptent une position critique du même ordre. Rappelons rapidement les persécutions dont les pôles melāmīs furent victimes. Le premier de ces maîtres à avoir été emprisonné est Bünyamīn Ayāşī (m. 1520), paysan vivant dans la région d'Ankara. Son disciple Pīr ʿAlī Aksarāyī a probablement été exécuté sur des accusations de messianisme[25]. Son fils Ismail Maʿşūkī fut exécuté à l'âge de dix-neuf ans avec douze de ses disciples au bout d'une enquête très précise et acquit une figure comparable à celle de Ḥallāj[26]. Les Melāmīs se firent oublier pendant une trentaine d'années jusqu'à Ahmed Sârbân. Son successeur, Hüssāmeddīn Ankaravī (m. 1557)[27] mourut incarcéré à Ankara. Bosnalı Ḥamza Bālī fut exécuté puis douze de ses lieutenants[28]. Le courant commença à être désigné sous le nom de Hamzevī et se fit plus discret. Cependant Lebenī Beşīr Ağa fut décapité avec à peu près quarante de ses disciples, à l'âge de quatre-vingt dix ans en 1663. Après cela le courant melāmī entra dans une clandestinité complète et finit plus ou moins par disparaître[29]. Un tel acharnement a de quoi surprendre. Il ne peut s'expliquer ni par des révoltes fomentées par des Melāmīs, qui d'ailleurs n'eurent pas lieu, ni par une menace politique

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[23] Pour ces révoltes voir par exemple Ocak, *La révolte ; Zındıklar* ; Balivet, *Islam mystique*.

[24] Simnānī dit par exemple dans l'introduction de son commentaire coranique : « Attendre la venue du mahdî ou du sceau des saints est donc une absurdité, une erreur et un avilissement de la concentration visionnaire. Il faut s'en tenir à la loi, à la voie et viser la parfaite affirmation de l'unicité pour qu'apparaisse en soi la force guidante et bien guidée et qu'elle repousse la force de l'imposteur ». Et Oğlan Şeyh Ibrāhīm critique quant à lui le messianisme insurrectionnel des Nūrbakhshīs, Sunullāh Gaybī, *Sohbetnāme* 154 ; et ce genre de messianisme plus généralement, Oğlan Şeyh Ibrāhīm, *Külliyat* 248.

[25] Ocak, Les Melâmî-Bayrâmî 101–102 ; Gölpınarlı, *Melâmilik* 45.

[26] Ocak, *Zındıklar* 274–290.

[27] A.Y. Ocak suppose que des documents administratifs publiés récemment indiquant qu'un shaykh Hüssām avait été exécuté en 1568 à Ankara concerneraient Hüssāmeddīn Ankaravī, mais on ne peut le garantir, Les Melâmî-Bayrâmî 104.

[28] Gölpınarlı, *Melâmilik* 76–77.

[29] Ocak, Les Melâmî-Bayrâmî 109.

quelconque. Les explications fournies par l'anthropologie religieuse n'apportent aucune réponse à ce problème[30]. Les Melāmīs répètent d'une part que le pouvoir politique n'est pas un obstacle à la perfection spirituelle[31], et d'autre part qu'ils ne recherchent en aucun cas le pouvoir politique[32]. A.Y. Ocak, finalement, justifie sa lecture en assimilant la notion de pôle employé par les Melāmīs à la figure messianique du Mahdī, du « maître du temps » et du lieutenant de Dieu (*halîfe*), ce qui lui permet d'affirmer que cela montre « clairement que le *kutüp* (le pôle) a une mission politique », et de conclure : « On ne pouvait donc pas attendre des Melāmīs, attachés à la doctrine du *kutüp*, qu'ils reconnaissent un pouvoir supérieur. Par ailleurs, cette doctrine, quoique non chiite, est la preuve également que la pensée melāmīe présente des ressemblances avec le chiisme »[33]. Ces glissements dans l'interprétation négligent totalement la signification de ces termes pas seulement dans la littérature melāmīe, mais aussi dans l'ensemble de la littérature mystique ottomane où on les trouve de la même façon sans pourtant conduire ni à la confusion avec la thématique shīʿite et le messianisme insurrectionnel ni à leur persécution. Plus grave encore est la conclusion méprisante pour la pensée : « Il n'est pas possible de réduire à une innocente question de « divulgation de secret de l'unité », comme l'affirmait A. Gölpınarlı, les évènements à l'origine

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[30] A.Y. Ocak explique tantôt la répression par « un manque d'harmonie dans leur système doctrinal », tantôt ainsi : « plus précisément, les melâmî-bayrâmî, même depuis l'époque d'Emir Sikkînî, ne pouvaient reconnaître comme légitime le pouvoir ottoman », Les melâmî-Bayrâmî 109. Au contraire c'est l'extraordinaire rigueur et cohérence de leur interprétation de l'unité de l'existence qui les caractérise. D'autre part, ils ne contestent nulle part l'empire ottoman et ses dirigeants, contrairement à un Niyāzī Mıṣrī qui ne fut pourtant pas exécuté. Au contraire, par exemple, Pīr ʻAlī Aksarāyī aurait désigné le Sulṭān Soliman en ces termes : « Majesté, le *mahd*ī du temps c'est vous-même », Laʿlīzāde, *Sergüzeşt* 35–36.

[31] Pīr ʻAlī Aksarāyī dit ainsi : « Si Ibrāhīm Edhem vivait à l'époque de ce pauvre (que je suis) il serait venu à moi et je n'aurais pas accepté qu'il abandonne le pouvoir. Je l'aurais fait parvenir à sa perfection, et il aurait été sultan à la fois du bas monde et de l'autre monde. L'aspirant sincère n'a pas besoin de renoncer au pouvoir de ce monde », *ibid.* 35.

[32] Lāmekānī le dit clairement : On a beau être roi, si l'on ne connaît pas son fond, la royauté de celui-là ne vaut rien, sache-le. Mon souhait est d'être Son esclave, par mon âme. Que ferais-je d'une principauté ou d'un empire ? Moi je connais Sa puissance et Sa valeur. Vends-moi donc le Bien-aimé dont je suis amoureux. Je n'échangerais pas pour la faveur des huit paradis un instant et un moment avec celui que j'aime. Depuis que Non-lieu (Lāmekānī) a sombré dans l'océan de l'amour, il n'a connu ni difficulté ni facilité », Ilic, *Hüseyin* 164–5 ; de même Sārbān Ahmed : « Impie et polythéiste est celui qui fuit les hommes de l'unité. Viens voir ces gens de l'enfer qui fuient le paradis. Ils délaissent le monde en élisant le coin de la pauvreté : la coutume des hommes de l'amour c'est fuir la couronne de l'empire », *Sārbān* 124.

[33] Ocak, Les Melâmî-Bayrâmî 110.

desquels se trouvaient des şeyh comme Ismail Maʿşûkî et Hamza Bâlî »[34]. D'une part le travail de la pensée ne peut en aucun cas être une innocente question, et elle n'est jamais prise de cette manière en particulier par les pouvoirs institutionnels, Etat, clergés, fondations mystiques. Le vingtième siècle nous l'a rappelé cruellement si on ne l'avait pas encore compris. D'autre part, c'est méconnaître gravement la dignité extrême que les Melāmīs accordaient à la pensée dans son travail, c'est-à-dire dans cet exercice particulier qu'est la conversation (*sohbet*) qui était à leurs yeux la seule activité à laquelle ils souhaitaient se livrer. Si les Melāmīs étaient victimes d'une violence si implacable et si répétée, eux qui étaient une poignée d'individus sans institutions mais qui se vouaient à penser, c'était précisément qu'ils représentaient la dignité de la pensée face à l'ensemble des institutions politiques, religieuses et mystiques qui faisaient de la loi l'essentiel de leur souci. Renverser le discours melāmī pour l'introduire de force dans le schéma hérésiographique de la révolte politico-religieuse et de sa répression n'est rien d'autre que légitimer une fois encore cette répression en en reproduisant les présupposés.

Ce poème de Sārbān Ahmed suffira à conclure :

> Ô toi l'amant qui cherche à contempler le bien-aimé
> Contemple donc avec attention chaque homme que tu vois.
> Sache que l'homme-miroir est la forme du Très-miséricordieux.
> Viens regarder ce miroir, en lui vois ce sultân.
> Si les hypocrites disent que l'âme ne se donne point à voir dans la forme,
> Toi qui désire la voir, jette donc un regard à l'âme !
> On a empêché les censeurs de contempler le bien-aimé.
> Les yeux aveugles n'ont aucune lumière, ils ne peuvent le voir.
> Toi, l'ascète ! si tu fermes les yeux devant la lumière du bien-aimé, qu'est ce que cela fera ?
> L'œil de la chauve-souris ne voit pas le soleil resplendissant.
> Moi si j'apprends quelque chose du sceau de rubis
> Je ne donnerais pas un de ses grains pour cent royaumes de Salomon.
> Ahmed ! ne va pas dévoiler les mots des secrets à l'ignorant,
> Ne crois pas que la haute source de vie convienne aux animaux[35].

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[34] Ocak, Les Melâmî-Bayrâmî 111.
[35] Gölpınarlı, *Melâmilik* 59.

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KAYGUSUZ ABDAL: A MEDIEVAL TURKISH SAINT AND THE FORMATION OF VERNACULAR ISLAM IN ANATOLIA

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The archaeology of the religious lives of Turkish speakers in late medieval and early modern Anatolia is in many ways still in its infancy. Even though significant strides were taken in this area during the late Ottoman and early Republican eras, the field suffered from the unquestioned hegemony of a single paradigm during the course of the entire twentieth century, which—we can now see with the benefit of hindsight—stifled new and innovative research. This paradigm, was, of course, the one put into place by M.F. Köprülü, according to which Anatolian Turkish religiosity had to be understood primarily in the light of the pre-Islamic cultural history of Turks in Central Asia. Köprülü's approach privileged continuity over against change in the religious thought and practice of Turkish speakers both in the *longue durée* (from pre-Islamic to Islamic periods) and in geographical and cultural expanse (from Central and Southwest Asia to Anatolia and the Balkans).[1] The Köprülü paradigm was, at least initially, a step forward in at least the sense that it brought the Turkish vernacular into full view and focused the scholarly gaze squarely on Turkish speakers, but in the long run it had several unfortunate consequences, which, for those who have labored under its influence, include an inability to conceive the religious lives of vernacular speakers as dynamic, ever-changing webs spun by actual human beings who lived at the threshold of continuity and rupture, of the new and the old. Speakers of Turkish (not to mention other vernaculars spoken in Anatolia) were not, however, mere repositories of culture but actual architects of it, and in the half millennium long history of their Islamization between the tenth and fifteenth centuries and beyond, it is their dynamism and agency, not their presumed preservation of "archaic" lifeways, that need to be explored and explained. It is high

[1] For a critique of the Köprülü paradigm, see the Foreword by Devin DeWeese in Köprülü, *Early Mystics* viii–xxvii. For an extensive study of Köprülü's approach to religion, see Markus, *Writing Religion*. For the sake of simplicity, modern Turkish orthography is followed throughout, with only a few exceptions.

time, therefore, that we turn our gaze directly to vernacular Islam and begin to write its history in a comprehensive fashion.

What is nowadays called the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition in Turkey fits squarely into the broader category of vernacular Islam.[2] This is most emphatically not a unitary tradition, and the outlines of its early history, especially before the sixteenth century, are fuzzy at best and obscure at worst.[3] Nevertheless, it is a safe assumption to make that Turkish speakers benefited from multiple sources in fashioning their religious thought and practice, and my aim here is to direct attention to one of those wellsprings they drew from, namely dervish piety as represented by a nebulous group that historians of Anatolia refer to as *abdalan-ı Rum*, following the example of the chronicler Aşıkpaşazade (d. 889/1484).[4] Whether or not the *abdal*s of *Rum* may have been interconnected as a loose social grouping through master-disciple relationships, regional attachments, distinctive practices and the like remains largely a matter of conjecture, but when seen through the lens of the Turkish vernacular, it seems likely that what led contemporary observers such as Aşıkpaşazade to subsume them under a single heading was their linguistic practice: as opposed other dervish groups like the Qalandars, Ḥaydarīs, Jāmīs, and Shams-i Tabrīzīs, who most probably spoke Persian (at least during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the *abdal*s of *Rum* spoke Turkish. The richest historical sources for this Turkish dervish piety are, of course, hagiographical texts that begin to proliferate during the second half of the fifteenth century, and this sizeable hagiographical corpus still needs to be tapped by researchers for what they can reveal to us about Alevi-Bektaşis.[5] Much rarer are the actual, direct voices of the *abdal*s themselves in the form of their own textual compositions, and it is against this backdrop that the towering figure of Kaygusuz Abdal comes into view as a prolific *abdal* author and poet who left behind a vast textual legacy.

The rich and complex corpus of Kaygusuz Abdal (d. first half of the fifteenth century) remains understudied, no doubt partly because his works—in prose, verse as well as prosimetrum in the form of monologues,

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[2] For an excellent summary of the current state of scholarship on Alevis, see Dressler, Alevīs.

[3] The most detailed documentation of early Alevi history is Karakaya-Stump, *Subjects of the Sultan*.

[4] For a thorough survey of "dervish piety," see Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*; *abdalan-ı Rum* are discussed on 70–78.

[5] The key study that set the bar for later works on hagiography is Ocak, *Menakıbnameler*.

inner dialogues, visions, sermons, and didactic epistles—do not easily lend themselves to literary and historical analysis. A close scrutiny of this corpus suggests that Kaygusuz Abdal was instrumental in the development of a distinctly "provincial" and "latitudinarian" religious discourse in Turkish that explicitly and consciously situated itself *against* the perceived "metropolitan" and "authoritarian" discourses and practices of the Muslim scholars and Ṣūfīs who lived in large urban centers and who operated largely within the orbit of the learned traditions couched in classical Arabic as well as Persian (which had emerged as the second "classical" Islamic language during the eleventh and twelfth centuries). This religious discourse in the Turkish vernacular—the discursive and performative tradition of *abdal* piety as exemplified in the work of Kaygusuz Abdal—must have been one of the sources, if not *the* main source that nourished the formation of "Alevism."

The historical life of Kaygusuz Abdal is almost totally enveloped in obscurity.[6] His hagiography, which was clearly compiled at least a generation or two after his death, does not contain much reliable information on his life, and, in any case, the overall features of this sacred biography are simply too generic for it to be viewed as a viable source for Kaygusuz Abdal's vita.[7] His proper name does not appear in his own works (or, for that matter, in his hagiography); instead, he consistently refers to himself with the epithet Kaygusuz Abdal, which can be rendered as "the dervish without concerns" or "the care-free dervish." Certain clues in his literary output strongly suggest that he was a disciple of Abdal Musa, an equally elusive dervish of the late fourteenth century.[8] In terms of the obscurity of our knowledge of his life, Kaygusuz Abdal is only typical of most other dervish figures of early Anatolian Islam; however, unlike practically all other dervishes/*abdal*s of the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, Kaygusuz Abdal uniquely left behind a large number of written works in both prose and verse. These include: *Budalaname* (The Book of Dervishes), *Kitab-ı Maglata* (The Book of Prattle), *Vücudname* (The Book of Being), *Dilgüşa* (The Exhilarating), *Saraynam*e (The Book of the Mansion), three long *mesnevi*s (1017, 367 and 338 couplets), four short *mesnevi*s (under 100 couplets), one long work in verse *Gülistan* (The Rose Garden), which is

[6] A comprehensive summary of previous scholarship on him can be found in Azamat, Kaygusuz Abdal.

[7] Güzel, *Kaygusuz Abdal (Alâeddin Gaybī) menākıbnāmesi*.

[8] Güzel, *Abdal Musa velayetnamesi*.

extant only partially as well as one hundred to one hundred and fifty individual poems.[9]

> Dost senin yüzünden özge / Ben kıble-i can bilmezem
> Pirin hüsnün severim / Bir gayrı iman bilmezem
>
> Bana derler ki şeyatin / Senin yolunu azdırır
> Ben şu zerrak sufilerden / Gayrı bir şeytan bilmezem
>
> Sufi-yi salus nedendir / Hüsne münkir geçindiği
> Ne aceb bela geliptir / Şu ki ben dosttan bilmezem
>
> O şah-i hüsnün aşkına / Özümü viran kılmışam
> Kaygusuz Abdal'dır adım / Cübbe vü kaftan bilmezem[10]
>
> Friend, I don't know a sacred direction other than your face
> I love the beauty of the guide, I have no other faith
>
> They tell me "Devils lead you astray"
> The only devils I know are the deceitful Ṣūfīs!
>
> Why is it that the hypocritical Ṣūfī pretends to reject beauty?
> Strange trials afflict us, yet I don't blame the friend for them
>
> I rendered myself into a ruin for the love of that king of beauty
> My name is care-free dervish, I am a stranger to cloak and gown

Kaygusuz Abdal has a fascinating literary and poetic voice, which needs to be analyzed for its own sake. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus only on those aspects of his thought that enable us to situate him, and by extension the category of popular Muslim saints commonly identified in our sources as *abdal* or *derviş*, vis-à-vis another large category of Muslim mystical leaders, who appear as *sufi* and/or *mutasavvıf*. These latter are referred to as *sufi* and/or *mutasavvıf* in sources that were sympathetic to them, but they are designated as "the deceitful, hypocritical Ṣūfī," or simply as *sofu* in sources that were highly critical of them. Indeed, the word *sofu*, essentially the form of the Arabic word *Ṣūfī* when it is subjected to Turkish vowel harmony, comes to mean "religious hypocrite, bigot" in Turkish (paralleling the evolution of the word *zāhid* in Persian from "renunciant" to "hypocrite"). It is the fault line that separates *abdal*/

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[9] Compact listing in Azamat, Kaygusuz Abdal 76; summarized in Güzel, *Kaygusuz Abdal* 89–151.

[10] Gölpınarlı, *Kaygusuz Abdal, Hatayi, Kul Himmet* 33–34; the English translation that follows is mine.

derviş from *sofu* that I wish to examine here on the basis of Kaygusuz Abdal's works.[11]

Kaygusuz Abdal is explicit and unrelenting in his criticism of those Ṣūfī masters who separate themselves out from the common folk through the use of such mechanisms of cultural marking as special dress codes and carefully chosen accoutrements. The mantle, cloak and robe, the turban and shawl, the rosary, prayer rug and water jug all become unacceptable to him when they are codified and deployed as markers of piety. All ostentatious acts of piety, such as artificially slow and calm articulation in everyday speech, keeping the head low as a show of modesty, frequent sighing, and deliberate pouching of lips so as to be perceived as fasting, are instead sure signs of hypocrisy. In a delightful turn of phrase, Kaygusuz Abdal refers to such practitioners of false piety as *kibriya müşrikleri*, "the idolaters of haughtiness," who (and I'm quoting here) "fancy themselves to be Hüseyin-i Şibli, Cüneyd-i Bagdadi, Bayezid-i Bistami and Hasan-ı Basri and claim to perform miracles. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their exteriors are bright, their interiors are dark. All of them are garrulous gluttons and hypocritical opportunists. [...] Thinking that people have chosen them as their guides, they puff themselves up with pride! God forbid, God forbid, carcasses cannot become guides! Liars don't become saints just as beggars don't become rich."[12]

There is, of course, nothing surprising about such direct and clear criticism of "false Ṣūfīs" or "Ṣūfī-pretenders;" indeed, as is well-known, by the fifteenth century there was already a long and distinguished roster of internal critics of Ṣūfism that included such household names as Sarrāj, Hujwīrī, Ghazālī, and Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar Suhrawardī. Seen from this vantage point, Kaygusuz Abdal does not appear to be either original or remarkable. After all, he may simply have been yet another Ṣūfī who rose to the challenge of distinguishing the authentic item from fraudulent copies, which, such critics complained, permeated Muslim communities. Yet, such an interpretation of Kaygusuz Abdal's views on Ṣūfism is somewhat off target, which is a fact that does not become obvious until Kaygusuz Abdal's censure of "the idolaters of haughtiness" is viewed within the larger context of his thought.

[11] I am using Kaygusuz Abdal's corpus as published by A. Güzel, but these published versions need to be improved by reliable critical editions.

[12] Kaygusuz Abdal, *Kaygusuz Abdal'ın mensur eserleri* 68–69 (*Budalaname*).

As an entry into Kaygusuz Abdal's oeuvre, let us turn to the startlingly dream-like *Kitab-ı Maglata* (The Book of Prattle).[13] Ostensibly, this is a work in which Kaygusuz Abdal spills out, as it were, in unedited format his fantastic visions that describe his adventures in the sacred realm and in sacred time. In these visionary experiences, Kaygusuz Abdal meets prophets ranging from Adam to Muḥammad, both singly and in congregation, experiences the very beginning and the end of time (that is, the creation and the day of judgment), and has frequent encounters with Satan. This latter often disguises himself as a well-appointed *shaykh* or a *zāhid*, but Kaygusuz Abdal always detects and identifies the Devil, proceeds to wrestle with him and invariably defeats and exposes the incorrigible "inciter to evil." All this makes for brisk and entertaining reading, and in the process, one develops the distinct feeling that Kaygusuz Abdal was every bit a visionary as any other visionary mystic before him, in the same league with figures like Rūzbihān Baqlī and Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Yet, a careful perusal of this book of "gibberish" reveals it to be a striking interiorization of salvation history: Kaygusuz Abdal's visions are not excursions into an external albeit "mythic" time and space à la Mircae Eliade or into a cosmic imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) à la Ibn al-ʿArabī; instead, they are forays into the spiritual body of the cosmic human being, the meganthropos, of which each human individual is an authentic replica. As Kaygusuz asserts in his *Dilgüşa*, God is literally immanent in human beings: "Truth satiates the world / The world is suffused with truth" (*Hakk cümle ʿâlem içinde doludur*),[14] and what may initially appear to be an actual history of creation, prophetic intervention and apocalypse is really the story of personal spiritual development for each human individual. The different prophets are human virtues, and Satan and his associates (like Pharaoh and Nimrod) are human vices. And Satan in the guise of *zāhid* (or we can say *Ṣūfī*) is that aspect of the human person that simultaneously generates and falls prey to ostentatious piety as well as ritualism and legalism: "The veil between you and truth is yourself" (*Hakk ile senin arandaki hicab sensin!*).[15] God's presence in the human is covered over by Satan and his accomplices like property, real estate, gold, silver, spouses, offspring, friends, companions, relatives, good name, and food which all lead one to rejection of the Truth. But there is hope: the correct

[13] Kaygusuz Abdal, *Kaygusuz Abdal'ın mensur eserleri* 82–130.
[14] Kaygusuz Abdal, *Dilgüşa* 105.
[15] *Ibid.* 105.

strategy is love and acceptance since, Kaygusuz Abdal tells his readers, "The creation belongs to those who accept, not to those who reject!" (*halk kabul edenindir, inkar edenin degildir*).[16] Ultimately, the sure solution and the safe path to adopt is to turn oneself over to the guidance of an expert spiritual director, *mürşid-i kamil*.

In effect, then, Kaygusuz Abdal undertakes a complete interiorization of God, Satan, other cosmic actors such as prophets, angels, and saints, cosmic entities as well as sacred history: "These books, prophets, this world, the other world, truth, falsehood—these are states of human beings" (*Bu kitaplar, peygamberler, dünya, ahiret, hakk, batıl demek insanun kendü halidir*).[17] Such a divinization of the human has serious social consequences. Kaygusuz Abdal collapses the spiritual into the physical and designates the resulting unified world as the proper arena for human worship of the divine. The divine is, of course, but the hidden aspect of the human, and the goal of worship is simply to uncover that truth hidden within each and every human being. Who, then, is the true believer? Who qualifies as the "representative" (*halife*) of God? Kaygusuz Abdal provides the following description: "[the divine representative is] vigilant of the truth, bashful of the Prophet, sincerely loyal to friends of God; s/he refrains from unrighteous behavior, looks with the intent to draw a lesson, talks with wisdom, sees God wherever s/he looks; s/he is a reliable friend, companion and neighbor; s/he doesn't rebel against those in authority, nor does s/he ever abandon hope of truth; s/he takes the road proper for his/her destination and travels with appropriate caution; s/he speaks with knowledge to those who are unlearned but remains silent in the presence of those who know."[18]

It is striking that there is no mention of ritual obligations in this description nor of obedience to the *sharīʿa*; in fact, nowhere in any of Kaygusuz Abdal's works is there any indication that he considered prescribed rituals or legal prescriptions and proscriptions of any kind relevant to the endeavor to uncover the divine within the human. Other evidence contained in his output suggests strongly that Kaygusuz Abdal also interiorized the *sharīʿa* by reducing it to his own moral imperatives outlined above; he appears to have adapted its ethical dimensions to fit his own vision but rejected its strictly legal aspects altogether, most likely

[16] *Ibid.* 49
[17] *Ibid.* 111.
[18] Kaygusuz Abdal, *Sarayname* 46.

because he viewed the exoteric *sharīʿa* as but a tool of ostentatious piety wielded by *Ṣūfī*s! Remarkably, there is no reflection of either legal scholars or religious officials in his writings, which leads one to think that like most of the *abdal*s in Asia Minor and the Balkans, he lived in rural, provincial contexts away from the gaze and reach of the urban legal establishments. This impression is borne out by the clear preference that his works display for vernacular Turkish, even though Kaygusuz Abdal was most clearly a learned person fluent in Persian, proficient in Arabic, and fully adept in versification in *aruz* (the majority of his independent poems are in *aruz*, not in syllabic meter which was more characteristic of poetry in the vernacular).

In the light of this quick survey of Kaygusuz Abdal's thought, his censure of "false Ṣūfīs" that we started with takes on a new significance. Clearly, Kaygusuz Abdal was not just another internal critic of Ṣūfism who sought to brush aside Ṣūfī-pretenders and outright impostors by their criticism in order to bring to view its genuine golden core. In Kaygusuz Abdal's eyes, even such a critic, if he also socially "marked" himself as a Ṣūfī through distinctive dress and "ostentatious" piety, would still have qualified merely as a *sofu*! To put it somewhat differently, Kaygusuz Abdal viewed Ṣūfīs as a whole with extreme suspicion at best, and ultimately he rejected them as "idolaters of haughtiness" who attempted to raise themselves to positions of social power above the rest through ostentation, hypocrisy, and deception. Collectively and individually, they formed clear testimony to the victory of the Devil and his associates who operated within each and every human being, and who could only be wrestled down to ignominious defeat under the guidance of perfect spiritual directors. These latter, the perfect directors, trained people to develop their rational faculties through emulation of Muḥammad (who, Kaygusuz Abdal explicitly states, stands for reason) and learn to practice acceptance and love through the example of ʿAlī (who, Kaygusuz tells us, personifies love).[19] The "care-free dervish" clearly saw himself and his *derviş* lineage as the true bearers of the heritage of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. The *abdal*s, it seems, thought that they captured the true core of Islam, crucially shorn of its legalistic and deceptive accretions, and held it up to the general population in its pure, uncorrupted state. And in so doing, they deliberately refused to set themselves apart as 'elite specialists' through special dress, accoutrements or

[19] Kaygusuz Abdal, *Kaygusuz Abdal'ın mensur eserleri* 87 (*Kitab-ı Maglata*).

ritualistic observance; their only capital was their wise words in the vernacular and their personal life examples.

The *abdal*s of *Rum* were speakers of the Turkish vernacular, and it should by now be patently clear that they were thoroughly Islamized. Not only did they see themselves as the "true" Muslims; what we know about their thought (as best exemplified in the writings of Kaygusuz Abdal) constitutes ample evidence that they drew heavily and expertly on the very core of the Ṣūfī tradition. Yet, their Turkish vernacular Ṣūfī prism on Islam most crucially excluded *sharīʿa*-centered discourses and practices—including much of urban Ṣūfism—from its purview, primarily because this "metropolitan" Islam, as packaged and purveyed by elite religious specialists who set themselves up as the final arbiters of correct belief and behavior, came across to the *abdal*s as authoritarian, and, even more importantly, as a vile distortion of the key message of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. It seems that for the dervishes (at least as reflected in the works of Kaygusuz Abdal), the *ʿulamāʾ* were all but invisible; instead, they directed their ire and criticism to the Ṣūfīs. The *sofu*s, as the *abdal*s called them, were mere impostors and frauds, who were pushed to ostentatious and false display of piety through pure pride and greed and who used their—often imperfect and faulty—knowledge of Arabic and Persian as a tool to exploit the public. The *abdal*s, by contrast, sided with the Turkish speaking rural masses and chose to "blend in" with regular people by avoiding special dress, urban speak and *sharīʿa*-based recipes for social conduct and ritual. Their vernacular latitudinarian form of Islam, though it had its roots thoroughly imbedded in Ṣūfism, was set up in complete opposition to the "fraudulent" Islam of urbanite Ṣūfīs.

One can only speculate about the origins of *abdal* piety. In an earlier work, the present author viewed the formation of dervish piety in general (inclusive of all itinerant dervish groups) as a reaction to the rapid institutionalization of Ṣūfism during the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries in particular.[20] It now seems appropriate to recalibrate that interpretation by adding the vernacular factor to the equation. The fissure between institutionalized Ṣūfī paths that took shape around the nuclei provided by authoritative, and increasingly also authoritarian, Ṣūfī masters on the one hand and loose dervish groups that assembled around the example of libertine itinerant Ṣūfī masters on the other hand can now be seen to include, at least partially, a linguistic rift. As a Muslim urban high

[20] Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*.

culture in Persian took shape during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and Ṣūfī discourses and practices gradually assumed a secure place in Persian-speaking elite culture, the growing elitism of "respectable," "established" urban Ṣūfīs generated a latitudinarian reaction among Persian vernacular speakers in the form of dervish piety, as exemplified in Qalandars, Ḥaydarīs, and Jāmīs, who all spoke vernacular Persian.[21] This social reaction was simultaneously reflected in elite literary culture in the form of the *kharābāt* complex in Persian poetry.[22] More or less the same process was at work at a slightly later period among Turkish speakers in Anatolia: as an urban elite culture in Turkish took shape from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, the vernacular reaction (or, to be precise, one particularly prominent strand of this reaction) to Anatolian Muslim elite culture took the form of *abdal* piety. In this process of vernacularization, *sharīʿa*-centered discourses and practices of Islam became a casualty, and they were largely ignored or discarded.[23]

To return to the Alevis: it appears highly likely that the formation of Alevi communities in Anatolia occurred through a process of Islamization in which especially nomadic and newly settled Turkish speakers constructed distinctive discursive and performative lifeways informed by the example of *abdal*s and dervishes like Kaygusuz Abdal. To recapitulate, the emergence of Alevis dates back to the earliest phase of the simultaneous Islamization and Turkification of Anatolia roughly from the beginning of the twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century. The influx of large numbers of western Turks, most of them pastoralist nomads, into the peninsula triggered a long process of de-Hellenization that went hand-in-hand with increasing Turkification. Although some Turks that came to Anatolia had already "Islamized" for several generations, others were not yet all that familiar with Islamic traditions. The same applied to the indigenous Kurdish populations of Eastern Anatolian highlands whose exposure to Islam up until that point had been minimal and sporadic. Many Turkish nomads and some Kurds of this period, it seems, fashioned permutations of the form of Islam already developed and deployed by *abdal*s that was centered on a divinization of the human (which might be called "theistic

[21] Khatīb-i Fārisī, *Manaqib-i Jamāl al-Dīn-i Sāvī*.

[22] Karamustafa, *Formative Period* 164–66.

[23] Another prominent strand of the vernacular reaction is represented by Yunus Emre, who was equally critical of ostentatious display of legalistic piety and Ṣūfī institutionalization, though he himself stayed within the orbit of the *sharīʿa*. See Karamustafa, İslam tasavvuf düşüncesinde Yunus Emre'nin yeri.

humanism") through veneration of ʿAlī (hence the name Alevi, which however is mostly a modern label) and characterized by a distaste for the trappings of "established" Islam, including its institutional and legal manifestations.

Significantly, this ʿAlī-centered Islam, though definitely tinged with Shīʿism in a broad sense, did not harbor a class of scholars who based their authority on their mastery over learning expressed in classical Arabic and elite Persian or elite Turkish. In the absence of legal and theological scholarship that characterized urban Islamic environments, Alevis of the countryside developed their identity around teachings imparted to adherents through communal rituals, generically known as *cem*, in the form of gatherings that featured music, dance, alcoholic drinks, and shared food. Such rituals as well as regulation of communal affairs were overseen by a class of hereditary ritual specialists and communal elders known as *dede* (grandfather), many of whom claimed descent from ʿAlī. Over time, especially under the Ottomans, the 'nascent' Alevi communities maintained a distinct distance from "established" Islamic scholarly discourses and canonical practices. The main interface between these communities who used the Turkish vernacular on the one hand and "established" Islam that privileged learning in Arabic and Persian on the other was the Bektaşi order of dervishes, whose leaders came to assume the position of *dede*s in some Alevi communities.

To conclude: communities today called Alevi/Bektaşi in Turkey took shape in the course of the long and complex process of Islamization of the Anatolian peninsula. Naturally, many cultural strands of different origins must have flown into the vortex that ultimately generated such communities, and it will take considerable time, energy and ingenuity to identify and reassemble at least some of the constituent elements that Turkish and Kurdish speakers have been fashioning into Alevi/Bektaşi traditions for well over a half millennium now. The present paper is intended as a contribution to this sprawling project of uncovering the cultural history of Alevi communities by identifying one key component of their traditions as *abdal* piety. *Abdal* piety, which emerged as a particular inflection in the Turkish vernacular of certain ideas and practices originating from "established" or "metropolitan" Islam in the form of a reaction to what *abdal*s perceived as the hypocrisy and elitism of forms of Islam emanating from urban centers, found a receptive audience primarily among newly Islamizing nomads and recently settled "new peasants," and it was re-fashioned by them into forms of religiosity that eventually came into view in the twentieth century under the name Alevis. Most Alevis today

do indeed consider Kaygusuz Abdal to be one of their "core" poet-saints, so it is only appropriate that we give the last word to that peerlessly carefree dervish:[24]

Allah, Tanrı, yaradan gel içegör cur'adan,
yar ile yar olagör çıksın agyar aradan.
Bekle gönül bostanın susığırı girmesin,
key sakın uçurursun kandili minareden.
Fil yükün karıncaya yükletme çekebilmez,
la'l ü gevher kıymetin umma seng-i hareden.

Allah, God, Creator, come drink from the gourd
Be intimate with intimates, let otherness disappear

Watch the garden of the heart vigilantly so that water buffalos don't enter it
Be extremely careful or else you'll make the lamp of the light tower fly away!

Don't burden the ant with the elephant's load, it cannot possibly bear it
Don't expect the flint stone to have the worth of the ruby or the pearl

Hacca vardım der isen kanda vardın hacca sen,
kılavuzsuz kuş uçmaz bunca dağudereden.
Hacca varan kişinin gönül yapmak işidir,
gönül hakkın beytidir sakın sen emmareden.
Sen özünü bil nesin hak sende sen kandesin,
hakkı bilmek dilersen geç ağ ile hareden.

You claim to have gone on the pilgrimage, when could you possibly have gone there?
Even birds cannot cross so many mountains and ravines without a guide

A pilgrim's work is to reconcile hearts
The heart is God's house, protect it from that which commands to evil

Know yourself, know what you are, God is in you, where are you?
If you desire to know the truth, go beyond black and white

Dünya ahret demegil biliş ü yad demegil,
uzak savaşa düşme geç kuru sehhareden.
Tıfıllayın dembedem dambu dumbu söyleme,
Mansur'layın olursun bilmezsen müdareden.
İnsan nur-ı kadimdir hasta değil hekimdir,
sen dahi insan isen anla bu esrareden.

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[24] Gölpınarlı, *Kaygusuz Abdal, Hatayi, Kul Himmet* 37–40; the English translation is mine.

Don't say "this world" and "that world, don't distinguish friend from foreigner
Don't attempt to participate in a distant war, abandon this lifeless magician of a world

Don't talk gibberish like children all the time
If you don't practice humility you'll suffer the fate of Mansur [Ḥallaj]

The human is the eternal light, she is not sick, she is the physician
If you too are human, grasp this secret!

Aşık olan bu yolda can ile baş oynadır,
sen dahi aşık isen bakma gel kenareden.
Sen insanı sorarsan haktan ayrı değildir,
sıfatı zat-ı mutlak hırkası çar pareden.
Aklına akıl deme sözüne delil deme,
çünki kurtaramazsın nefsini emmareden.
Kaygusuz'un hüneri helva vü biryan yemek,
andan özge hüneri umma bu biçareden.

Those who become lovers on this path put their lives on the line
If you too are a lover, don't just watch from the side, jump in!

If you're searching for the human, she is not separate from the Truth
Her attribute is identical with her absolute self, her cloak is made of the four elements

Don't call your intellect an intellect, don't consider your words to be trustworthy
Because you cannot liberate yourself from that which commands to evil

The only talent of Kaygusuz is to eat roast meat and sweets
Don't expect any other talent from this destitute soul!

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THE WORLD AS A HAT: SYMBOLISM AND MATERIALITY IN SAFAVID IRAN*

Shahzad Bashir

The terms 'symbol,' 'symbolic,' and 'symbolism' are staples in the modern study of religion, occurring consistently in influential definitions as well as in historical, social scientific, literary, and philosophical studies that explore particular contexts in detail. This prevalence has in part to do with the very construction of the category religion, a term that evolved out of Christianity to encompass an enormous field of highly diverse data spanning ideational, psychological, and sociocultural arenas of human existence on a global level. As Sherry Ortner has written in an influential article that consolidates anthropological perspectives, major or 'key' symbols can be seen as entities that both "operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas" and are also "vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action."[1] From a literary perspective, Peter Struck's treatment of ancient Greek literature leads him to designate the symbol to be "a form of representation that has an intimate, ontological connection with its referent and is no mere mechanical replication of the world, that is transformative and opens up a realm beyond rational experience, that exists simultaneously as a concrete thing and as an abstract and perhaps transcendent truth, and that conveys a unique density of meaning."[2] Ortner and Struck's views are likely to resonate strongly with most scholars of religion since symbols figure prominently in secondary literature, both as components in the religious systems we study and as conceptual tools that we deploy in the modern scholarly enterprise of making sense of religious data.

In this essay, I argue that the question of symbols and their interpretation by religious actors holds a particularly important place while considering

* I am grateful to Sholeh Quinn and Nir Shafir for their helpful responses to earlier versions of this essay.

[1] Ortner, On Key Symbols 1340.

[2] Struck, *Birth of the Symbol* 2. I am grateful to Richard Martin for the reference to this work.

ideas and practices pertaining to Persianate societies during the approximate period 1400–1700 C.E. The period was host to significant religious innovation, whose effects can be seen in the production of new religious perspectives such as messianic movements and other syntheses involving Ṣūfism and Shīʿism in particular. If we take symbols as being integral to religious systems, we should expect to see in this period, as we indeed do, the production and elaboration of new symbols or thorough reimaginings of old ones that correspond with the new systems.

Going one step beyond this empiricist observation, I suggest that religious outlooks generated in the period 1400–1700 C.E. project a new attitude toward the very understanding and operation of symbols as aspects of religious worldviews. Existing studies (Babayan, Moin) have suggested that religious systems from the period evince a particular investment in the material rather than the unseen spiritual sphere as the paramount theater of religious enactment. This is reflected in the perceived immediacy of the apocalypse, in messianic movements with military agendas, and in social formations focused on bodies rather than ideas. In a corrective to this understanding, I suggest that what is new in the period 1400–1700 C.E. is not the greater emphasis on the material as such since, ultimately, all religious systems are enacted materially in conjunction with imagined non-material realms. Rather, what is distinctive here is a new attitude toward symbols as mediators between the physical and the metaphysical. In religious literature from the period, authors display a cognizance of the nature and purposes of symbols and actively deploy this knowledge in their prescriptions for action. This point leads me to suggest that the period may be said to contain a significant epistemological shift that pertains to both the construction of knowledge and the social enactment of religious ideas, processes in which symbols play critical roles.

The attitude toward religious symbols I see articulated in the types of Islamic materials I will survey below bears a strong resemblance to the way modern scholars have understood religious symbols as parts of intellectual schemes elaborated since the nineteenth century. In saying this I have no wish to make an anachronistic argument that would proclaim early modern Persianate societies to have been intellectually modern *avant la lettre*. Rather, I believe that the striking similarity of intellectual constructions between the Islamic and modern western contexts can help us clarify the specificity of new religious developments as an aspect of the historical evolution of Islamic ideas and practices. Furthermore, this exercise may help in thinking about some connections between religious

practices on the one hand and the secular study of religion on the other, a much-debated topic in the field.[3]

The centerpiece of this essay is a Persian work that I have found intriguing ever since I came across it, quite accidentally, a number of years ago. Entitled a very generic *Ṭarīq al-irshād* (The Path of Authoritative Instruction), the work indicates its author to be a certain Hāshim b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Najafī, who writes that he began composing it circa 966/1559–60 and completed it shortly thereafter. The work is known through a single manuscript, presently in Berlin, that gives the date of copying as 1083/1672. I have not found a reference to any other manuscripts and have also found no way to corroborate the author's identity. The work is concerned with an object, the twelve-gore red hat called the *tāj* or crown, worn by soldiers and Ṣūfī devotees professing allegiance to the Safavid kings of Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE. The hat in question is the very reason that followers of the Safavids were known as the Qizilbāsh, or 'red-heads', although it is significant that, as in some other prominent cases, the author of *Ṭarīq al-irshād* never uses this term.[4] In the ensuing analysis, I will provide a description for the work, along with possibilities for placing it in historical settings. I argue that what we see in this work represents the most comprehensive example of a pattern relevant for the larger socioreligious scene during the period. Toward the end of the essay, I will come back to the comparison between representations found in this work and the way modern scholars understand religious symbols.

Framework and Historical Context

The *Ṭarīq al-irshād* is an unusual and distinctive work, even though parts of it share properties with other works adjacent to it in time and space. Although the author provides a specific historical context that compelled him to write, it is difficult to date the work conclusively. Contextual clues such as the overall outlook and other, similar cases of proven projection backward in time by authors writing in the seventeenth century point to it

[3] I am referring here to the differences between 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives on religion, a vast arena of discussion and scholarship within the study of religion. For a sense of the breadth of the debate see McCutcheon, *Insider/Outsider Problem*.

[4] For a survey of the use of the term see Bashir, Origins and Rhetorical Evolution of the Term Qizilbāsh.

having been written later than what the author states in the introduction. To adjudicate the various possibilities, it is necessary to describe the work in some degree of detail.

The work is framed within an autobiographical narrative, beginning with the author's statement that he was motivated to write on the manners and customs of the people who are inclined to separation from society (*rusūm wa adab-i ahl-i tajrīd*) at a certain point in his life. We may presume this to have happened in Najaf since he gives his *nisba* as Najafī and says also that his desire to write was dormant until an angel (*surūsh*) from the shrine of ʿAlī whispered to him to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the eighth Imām, ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), in Mashhad. His journey first took him to Shīrāz, to the shrine of Aḥmad, a son of the seventh Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799). He states that in the year 966/1559–60, when he had reached Mashhad, the second Safavid monarch Shāh Tahmāsp made the proclamation that everyone in the realm must wear the distinctive Safavid crown or *tāj*. By chance, he then happened to hear someone recite a verse that contains a fine balance between threat and reward:

> The royal crown that ennobles the king's head,
> Whoever does not have this crown has a headless body.

These circumstances convinced Najafī that the treatise he wished to write must concern itself with the headgear, with the hope that it would find favor with the king and be disseminated widely for the purposes of religious education and edification.[5]

Having started the composition of the work, Najafī writes that he was perplexed about whether Muḥammad had conveyed the twelve-gore headgear to ʿAlī and, if so, how it had finally reached the living ultimate master, the Safavid king. One night as he lost consciousness after weeping and beseeching ʿAlī to intercede to relieve his ignorance, he had a momentous dream in which he was transported to the abode of the Twelfth Imām, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī al-Mahdī, in Ḥilla to be met by a group of seven religious dignitaries. During the encounter that followed, four of these were introduced to him as Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334, eponym of the Safavid silsila), Shaykh Junayd (d. 864/1460, Shāh Tahmāsp's great-grandfather), Ḥamza b. Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a son of the seventh Imām through whom the Safavids claimed to be Sayyids), and Sahl al-Tustarī (d. ca. 283/896, a famous early Ṣūfī authority). He was also told that he did

[5] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 2a–3b.

not have the capacity to withstand the knowledge of the remaining three individuals present at the occasion.

During the dream encounter, Ḥamza informed Najafī that Muḥammad himself had had a five-gore crown—the marker of prophecy (*nubuwwat*)—and that the one he had put on ʿAlī's head had twelve gores, indicating Imāmate and friendship with God (*walāyat*). This headgear had gone from head to head in generations of the Prophet's family with its secret known to members of the family alone. It was ultimately the patrimony of the Twelfth Imām, who is in occultation. He had placed it on Shāh Ismāʿīl's head when he had become king, transmitting it from the interior (*bāṭin*) to the exterior (*ẓāhir*) realm. The headgear had become a more general object in Safavid times because Ismāʿīl had commanded it to be placed on the heads of all his soldiers. It was because of his role as the receiver of the crown that Ismāʿīl was known as the deputy (*nā'ib*) of the Twelfth Imām, and by the same token, whoever wore it now with the true intention of doing so became a member of the Mahdī's army and would live to see the messiah triumph in the world. After providing this information, Ḥamza told Najafī that it was his duty to convey this knowledge to the larger world in writing. He then asked Sahl Tustarī to bring out the crown and a Ṣūfī cloak of investiture (*khirqa*), and both these objects were passed on to the author via Shaykh Ṣafī. Ḥamza then reiterated that Najafī must not hide this information from anyone and said that every Friday night he and all the Imāms come to the shrine of ʿAlī, circumambulate it, and pray for Ṭahmāsp's success. At this time, they are also available to be petitioned by anyone who decides to seek them there.

Najafī's last act in the dream was to ask Ḥamza about when the Mahdī himself would make his appearance. Ḥamza's response was enigmatic: he extended one of his fingers that had a ring on it and put his witnessing (*shahāda*) finger on the ring. When pointed toward Najafī, the ring became lit brighter than the full moon, illuminating the earth and the sky. The author lost his capacity to speak upon witnessing this marvel. Later, when he had been slack in taking up the task of writing about the crown, a man wearing white and riding a white horse appeared to him in a dream and told him that he must not go against the command given to him in the first vision.[6]

The autobiographical framing of Najafī's treatise replicates a well-worn pattern in Islamic literatures. The dream narrative legitimates the work

[6] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 6b–10b.

itself while also touching upon all the elements necessary for the legitimacy of the Safavid dynasty. These include endorsements from Muḥammad, the Twelver Imāms from ʿAlī to Mahdī, an early celebrity representing the general authority of Ṣūfism, and Safavid genealogical forbears, Shaykh Ṣafī and Shaykh Junayd.[7] Moreover, the writing of Najafī's work is cast as a pressing task since through it those who wear the Safavid hat are to be apprised of its symbolism and the connection between them and the coming messiah. The light imagery at the end of his dream encounter underscores the urgency of the task but without tying the prophecy down to a particular point in time. The narrative as a whole is reminiscent of other apocalyptic unveilings through which individuals travel to extraordinary realms in order to acquire credentials prior to taking on critical tasks in the material sphere.[8]

Although Najafī provides the date of work's composition plainly enough in the work, it is difficult to correlate the self-statement with other sources that report on the time in which he claims to be writing. Based on contextual considerations, it is more probable that the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* is a later composition that projects its origins backward in time in order to afford itself greater legitimacy in the eyes of its contemporary audience. To make this point, let me lay out considerations for and against accepting the work's internal claim regarding its point of origin.

Najafī claims that he decided to undertake his task following Tahmāsp's decree that his subjects must wear the red headgear issued in 966/1559–60. Historical sources closest to Tahmāsp's reign do not mention any such order, although they do describe the Safavid court as being in considerable commotion during the years 966–67/1559–71 because the renegade Ottoman prince Bāyazīd, son of Sulṭān Sulaymān I, had arrived in Iran seeking sanctuary. It is conceivable that the perennial Safavid-Ottoman wrangling had become especially acute at the time, leading to extraordinary military propaganda that may have included the emphasis on the headgear that marked Safavid cadres as soldiers as well as Ṣūfī disciples

[7] For the most up-to-date discussion of Safavid genealogy, which indicates that the Safavids claimed sayyid status many decades before Shāh Ismāʿīl declared himself king, see Morimoto, Earliest ʿAlid Genealogy 465–66.

[8] For a detailed assessment of another dream that runs through Safavid historiographical production see Quinn, *Historical Writing* 65–76. An extensive literature now exists for understanding the wide-ranging functions of dreams in Islamic narratives. For a recent representative collection of articles see Felek and Knysh, *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*.

of the Safavid king.[9] Concerned with a slightly earlier period, the Safavid crown also figures prominently in narratives concerned with the Mughal ruler Humāyūn's exile in Iran in 1544–45. Humāyūn had put the crown on his head either as a token of honor (in one Mughal source) or subservient fealty (in Safavid sources) during his audience with Tahmāsp.[10]

Against a straightforward contextual rationale, it has to be noted that, like other Safavid monarchs after him, Tahmāsp is known for trying to limit the powers of the Qizilbāsh military elites rather than promoting those known for wearing the red headgear. Moreover, a number of particulars regarding Najafī's work seem to suggest an origin among circles of the Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* who objected to the Qizilbāsh as being religiously wayward. For example, Najafī never uses the term "Qizilbāsh" in his text despite the fact that the work is dedicated to the red headgear. The text's description of those who wear the headgear is also entirely religious, bearing no connection whatsoever to the social context of the Qizilbāsh as we know it from other sources. In the Safavid context, the Qizilbāsh represented the tying together of a religious ideology with the social structures of Turkoman tribes that had become attached to Safavid Ṣūfī masters from the fifteenth century onward. Qizilbāsh identity as it comes across in chronicles is thus a mixture of religious ideology and social solidarity based on tribal affiliations and is never purely the former.[11] As I have discussed elsewhere in detail, the term Qizilbāsh has a checkered history when it comes to its use in Persian-language chronicles. In this sense, Najafī's work is not entirely extraordinary for not employing the term, but its omission in a work so focused on the red headgear certainly appears as a deliberate choice with ideological underpinnings.[12]

Following this line of thought, it is possible that Najafī's work amounts to religious rationalization of a powerful social object that intends to take the right of its interpretation and deployment away from the soldiers

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[9] Cf. Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh* iii, 1415–23, and Qummī, *Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh* i, 401–17. For the intensity of Safavid-Ottoman diplomatic efforts concerned with Bāyazīd's presence in Safavid domains see Nawāʾī, *Shāh Tahmāsp Ṣafawī* 350–446, and Mitchell, Am I my Brother's Keeper?

[10] Cf. Moin, *Millennial Sovereign* 125–27.

[11] In this vein, the only published source devoted exclusively to the Qizilbāsh (composed ca. 1009/1600) is concerned entirely with describing tribal lineages rather than ideology. The Qizilbāsh here are described as those who are "graced and exalted by the blazing royal crown and are appointed to awe-inspiring positions of ruling the lands of Iran on account of dedicating their lives to the exalted Safavid family" (Anonymous, *Tarīkh-i Qizilbāshān* 8).

[12] Cf. Bashir, Origins and rhetorical evolution of the term Qizilbāsh.

who sport it and place it in the purview of Safavid kings alone. While the Qizilbāsh brought the Safavids to power, their internal fractiousness was a problem for the Safavid state from the beginning, leading the kings to invest in alternative sources of legitimacy. Tahmāsp had to confront this problem throughout his reign and he is attributed the policy of trying to forge a new identity for his followers that would bind them to him personally rather than via the intermediacy of fractious tribal leaders. Known under the name "shāhsīvan" or "lovers of the king," this identity privileged religious commitment above clan loyalties and fits well with the overall impetus of Najafī's work as represented in the combination of Ṣūfī and Shīʿī figures witnessed in his dream.[13] This line of interpretation can account for the facts that Najafī neither mentions the term Qizilbāsh in his work nor makes any reference to more particular tribal names (such as Shāmlū, Rūmlū, Ustājlū, etc.) that occur in other sources from the period while describing the activities of the Qizilbāsh. The text would then seem to derive its sociopolitical potential from the fact that while Najafī gives the headgear its due as a powerful symbol, he reconfigures the justification for its power away from the social fact of the political authority of the Qizilbāsh elites to the more abstract religious and royal realms. This move has the effect of strengthening the king's authority vis-à-vis the Qizilbāsh, an issue that was relevant throughout Safavid history.

The deeply religious nature of Najafī's argument and the highly deliberate effort to contextualize the crown's legitimation in Twelver Shīʿī terms makes it probable that the work is the product of the seventeenth century. Although the Safavid realm was declared a Twelver Shīʿī polity in 906–7/1501, it was not until the second century of Safavid rule that Shīʿī scholars became entirely dominant in societal discourse on religion. The only manuscript of Najafī's work available to us bears the date of copying as 1083/1672, more than a century after the year mentioned within the text as its point of composition. This is despite the fact that, within the work, the author makes a point of indicating that the explanations he is providing need to be circulated as widely as possible. The manuscript is very well produced, with gold lines and extensive silver illumination on all pages. Such an expensive artifact may indicate a courtly commission, which would fall under the reign of the king Sulaymān I (r. 1077–1105/1666–1694), who had initially been crowned as Ṣafī II but then had to undergo a new enthronement under a different name due to fears of

[13] For the shāhsīvan see Tapper, *Frontier Nomads*.

astrological inauspiciousness. This king is usually described as being weak and harem-bound, disinterested in affairs of state. It is conceivable that the dynasty's difficult circumstances in the late seventeenth century led to the production of a work that attempted to press the idea of dedication to the living Safavid monarch through a voice made to speak from an earlier, more glorious era.

Perhaps the greatest contextual reason to argue for later composition is the existence of a number of legendary and exaggerated accounts of the life of Shāh Ismāʿīl I that can be dated to the late seventeenth century. Of these, a work by the name of *Jahāngushā-yi Khāqān* is of particular interest because, based on internal evidence, it was thought to belong to the early period of Shāh Tahmāsp's reign (circa 930/1524) because it ends by invoking blessings on the young king. However, detailed study of its contents has proven that it was composed some time around 1091/1680, providing a clear case of a text pretending to be from an earlier period than its actual date of composition. This and other similar works reflect the culture of storytelling rather than the work of learned historians and have no counterparts in earlier periods, closer to the actual lifetime of the dynasty's founder.[14] It seems likely, then, that the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* was part of a larger pattern specific to the circumstances of the late seventeenth century when substantial dynastic propaganda seems to have been produced in the face of a disheartening political situation. This is made all the more probable by the fact that, in other Safavid literature, the headgear appears as a matter of a straightforward signifying uniform in sixteenth century sources but acquires symbolic dimensions with explicit connection to Twelver Shīʿism in the seventeenth century. I would, then, advocate the date at which the manuscript was copied (1083/1672) as being the rough marker for when the work was composed. Although contextually plausible, this interpretation does have the disadvantage that it requires us to consider the work as a forgery without absolutely explicit evidence.[15]

The two possibilities for contextualization I have mentioned are significant in that they corroborate, in alternative ways, what we know from other sources. However, an intriguing aspect of Najafī's work is also that

[14] Cf. Morton, The Date and Attribution of the *Ross Anonymous*. For recent assessments of this type of literature see Wood, The "Tarikh-i Jahanara" in the Chester Beatty Library.

[15] For a general description of the reign of Sulaymān I see Newman, *Safavid Iran* 93–103. For another work written in the final years of the Safavid dynasty (1127/1715) that contains strong rhetoric defending the realm in the face of challenges see Nājī, *Risāla dar pādshāhī-yi Ṣafawī*.

it provides a version of the possible beliefs of those who wore the Safavid headgear. We generally have very little confessional textual evidence for the religion of the Qizilbāsh, and the vast majority of what has been said about their religious practice has been adduced from behavior ascribed to them by external observers. The Qizilbāsh represent an interesting group in this regard since they are presumed to be successful because of their religious zeal, but seem not to have generated a literary tradition elaborating the basis for the zeal despite operating in the midst of a society widely devoted to literary expression. If we take the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* as reflecting a kind of rationalizing symbolic theology centered on the headgear, it would appear to be a rare exception to the general pattern.[16]

Intriguing and historiographically productive as it may be, the problem of historical contextualization is not the most interesting thing about Najafī's work. That mantle belongs to the detailed symbolic interpretation he provides for the object comprising nearly two-thirds of the whole work. What I have described so far regarding *Ṭarīq al-irshād* comes from the work's introduction, which is followed by two short chapters on general topics and a third longer one concerned specifically with the headgear. The first chapter contains descriptions and explorations regarding intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifat*) and the qualities of the guide (*murshid*), with particular affirmation of the idea that Shāh Tahmāsp occupies this position and must be obeyed and venerated in all conceivable ways.[17] The second chapter is concerned with defining the search for knowledge and the appropriate path toward it. It consists of Ṣūfī poetry and aphorisms regarding the rules and attitudes one must adopt in order to be a true traveler on the path.[18] These two chapters consist of highly generic materials likely to be found in most Ṣūfī guidebooks produced from the later medieval period onwards. The third chapter, entitled "on establishing the twelve-gore royal crown and knowledge regarding it," contains a systematic exposition of the headgear. It includes sections that place the headgear in salvation history, describe as well as interpret its physical attributes, and lay out the implications of accepting or rejecting it. Although the three chapters are of different value for the current analysis, I should emphasize that they flow together quite well in the original work,

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[16] For the most extensive reconstruction of the religious world of the Qizilbāsh see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*. For the effort to understand a particular practice attributed to the Qizilbāsh see Bashir, Shah Isma'il and the Qizilbāsh.

[17] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 11a–14b.

[18] *Ibid.* 14b–19a.

leading from general to specific topics as one would expect of a work in the genre of religious literature.

The Hat in Salvation History

In the remainder of this essay, I will focus particularly on the third chapter in the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* since this is where the question of symbolism is reflected in greatest detail. Najafī's first task in the chapter is to flesh out the headgear's cosmic significance hinted upon in the dream narrative he had provided earlier. The first version of the hat is said to have been placed on Adam's head at the moment of creation of humanity, and from then on conveyed to major prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad at key moments in their careers. For prophets until Muḥammad, he cites a work entitled *Futuwwatnāma-yi anbiyāʾ ʿalayhim al-salām* by Sayyid Muḥammad b. Sayyid ʿAlī al-Ḥusaynī al-Raḍawī as his source.[19] In parallel with the account of his own initiatic dream, Najafī writes that Muḥammad was given the hat and a cloak just before he climbed on to Burāq to go on his heavenly journey known as the *miʿrāj*. This event is described as a scene of cosmic fanfare: "He prayed two *rakʿa*s of thankfulness. When he was finished with these, Gabriel, reciting prayers, greetings (*salām*), and glorifications of God (*takbīr*), put that crown on the head of the Pride of Existent Beings, draped the cloak (*ḥulla*) over him, and tied the sash (*fūṭat*) around his middle. When the call of these came to the realms of Mulk, Malakūt, and Jabarūt, congratulations was received from sanctified beings (*qudsiyyān*) and holders of God's throne (*ḥāmilān-i ʿarsh*). All at once, angels emptied out platters of light onto the world."[20] The headgear dispensed in this instance had five gores and was white, indicating the luminescence of light and the color reported for the crowns given to earlier prophets as well.[21]

The conveying of the headgear from Muḥammad to ʿAlī marks a major change of pattern since it is the beginning of the period of friendship (*walāyat*) after that of prophecy (*nubuwwat*). This is said to have occurred during the famous incident known at Ghadīr Khumm when, according to Shīʿī belief, Muḥammad appointed ʿAlī as his successor, following the revelation of the Qurʾānic verse: "Messenger, make known that which has

[19] *Ibid.* 27a. I have not been able to identify this source.
[20] *Ibid.* 30b.
[21] *Ibid.* 31a.

been revealed to you from your Lord, for if you do not do it, you will not have conveyed His message. And God will protect you from people. Indeed, God does not guide the unbelievers" (Q 5:67). In Najafī's account, the headgear bestowed on ʿAlī at the moment of his designation was red in color and had twelve gores.[22] As in the case of the prophets, ʿAlī received a cloak and a sash to go with the headgear, the whole process now being identified clearly once again with the 'chivalrous' code known as *futuwwat*. In this portion of the text, Najafī calls the girdle tied around the middle of the body the *shadd*, a term used in *futuwwat* texts, whereas he uses the term *fūṭat* when referring to the cloth tied around the waists of prophets. In the case of ʿAlī, the sartorial investiture is followed also by the distribution of a halva called "sweet of the bowl" (*ḥalwā-yi jafna*), a ritual element that is included in books on *futuwwat* as well.[23]

Najafī's account of the transmission of investiture by the headgear varies considerably from most other *futuwwat* manuals when it comes to the period after ʿAlī. At this point in the work, he veers back to the imperative of justifying the Safavid dynasty. He states that the crown made its way from ʿAlī to the treasury of his son Ḥasan and then through the line of Twelver Imāms until the eighth Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā. From here, instead of continuing further along the line of Imāms, it was transferred to the seventh Imām's son Abū-l-Qāsim Ḥamza (al-Riḍā's brother) and then all the way to the Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn and eventually Shāh Tahmāsp. The genealogy of transmission provided here matches exactly the official Sayyid genealogy of the Safavid dynasty.[24] The fact that the headgear is described as part of the attire of the Mahdī as well means that this configuration of history marks Safavid rule as a period in which the Mahdī has become visible at least in part. Tahmāsp's alleged order that, according to Najafī, compelled him to compose the work thus comes across as being aimed at hastening the Mahdī's arrival. This would occur when the world is fully prepared for him as marked by the prevalence of the headgear throughout the Safavid realm.

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[22] *Ibid.* 31b–32a.

[23] *Ibid.* 34a. The published edition of Ḥusayn Wāʿiẓ-i Kāshifī's work *Futuwwatnāma-yi Sulṭānī*, the most extensive extant manual of its type, terms this sweet *ḥalwā-yi khufiya* (Kāshifī, *Futuwwatnāma* 128). This seems to be a mistake based on orthographic similarity between the two words since Kāshifī explains the meaning of the word "khufiya" as a large wooden bowl (*lāk-i chūbīn*), which makes little etymological sense. It fits perfectly if we read the word as "jafna," which refers to a large bowl.

[24] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 38a–39a; Morimoto, Earliest ʿAlid Genealogy 467.

While Najafī's account of the hat's origins has the legitimation of the Safavid dynasty as its chief purpose, it does not fully echo any other Safavid narratives on this subject. The first quite noteworthy issue in this regard is that although many (but not all) extant sources for Safavid history produced during the sixteenth century refer to Safavid soldiers as the Qizilbāsh, they do not provide any symbolic explanation for the hat. The headgear's popularity and prominence can be gauged by the fact that it can be seen depicted in paintings datable from 908–10/1503–5 onward, all the way through the sixteenth century.[25] Thus while there is no doubt whatsoever about the currency of the hat in the Safavid realm, literature from the sixteenth century is strikingly devoid of symbolic interpretations. As I have discussed elsewhere in detail, this situation changes very significantly in the seventeenth century when all the major chronicles produced under Safavid patronage place the origins of the headgear in a dream seen by Shaykh Ḥaydar, Shāh Ismāʿīl's father, with some authors describing a modification to it based on a spiritual encounter experienced by Ismāʿīl himself.[26] If we take Najafī's work to have been composed around 966/1560, it would amount to being the earliest known symbolic interpretation of the object, out of step with what we can gather from other sources that mention the headgear and employ the term Qizilbāsh in the sixteenth century. Conversely, if we understand the work as having been produced in the late seventeenth century as I prefer, then the version of the headgear's meaning provided by Najafī would have to be regarded as an alternative to the one found in other sources produced from the beginning of the seventeenth century. In either case, the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* can be seen as an attempt to provide a distinctive meaning to an object of great social and political value, with the ultimate aim of strengthening the hand of Safavid kings against other factions in the state. Also, Najafī's work provides evidence to believe that the hat was subject to multiple understandings tied to alternative religious and sociopolitical visions prevalent in the Safavid period.

Decoding/Encoding the Object

Now moving from the hat's sacred history to its physical structure, one of Najafī's numerous approaches toward symbolic interpretation involves

[25] Schmitz, On a Special Hat 104.
[26] Cf. Bashir, Origins and Rhetorical Evolution of the Term Qizilbāsh.

play on the word *tark*, which means both "gore" (the triangular piece of textile used to make the hat) and the act of forsaking a habit, act, or object. Employing both meanings simultaneously, he makes the twelve gores that comprise the *tāj* representatives for twelve reprehensible acts (*afʿāl-i dhamīma*) that are shunned by its wearer, to be replaced by alternative praiseworthy qualities. The pairs of qualities include: associating partners with God versus affirmation of his unity (*shirk*/*tawḥīd*), doubt versus certainty (*shakk*/*yaqīn*), ignorance versus knowledge (*jahl*/*ʿilm*), deception versus sincerity (*riyāʾ*/*ikhlāṣ*), sinfulness versus piety (*maʿṣiyyat*/*taqwā*), hatred versus love (*bughḍ*/*maḥabbat*), consumption of forbidden versus allowed foods (*ḥarām*/*ḥalāl*), miserliness versus generosity (*khasāsat*/*sakhāwat*), impatience versus contentment (*jazʿ*/*riḍā*), greed versus trust (*ṭamʿ*/*tawakkul*), pride versus humility (*kibr*/*tawāḍuʿ*), and falsehood versus truth (*bāṭil*/*ḥaqq*).[27] The act of wearing the hat thus comes with a complex set of doctrinal, ritual, and ethical obligations that flow directly from the way the object is constructed.

In Najafī's description, the hat is also thoroughly inscribed with Qurʾānic text. The top of the hat contains two of the most famous verses that describe God: the light verse that begins "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (Q 24:35) on the outside, and the Throne Verse, beginning "God, there is no god but He" (Q 2:255) on the inside. The bottom part of the hat, which encircles the head, contains the Yā Sīn chapter (Q 36) as well as the verse "He is the first and the last, and the manifest and the hidden, and He has full knowledge of all things" (Q 57:4). On the outside, the front contains the verse "Whichever direction you turn, there is the face of God; Indeed God is all-encompassing and knowing " (2:115), and the back the verses "Everything perishes save His face" (Q 28:88) and "To Him belongs judgment and to Him you will return" (Q 28:70).[28]

I believe that the choice and placement of verses on the object is highly deliberate, reflecting a conscious effort to mark the hat as an object that links its wearer to God. The verses on the top and the inside refer to cosmological matters with the general impression that the hat connects the human being, God's ultimate creation, to His cosmic presence. The hat thus represents what we may consider a link between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The Throne verse and the Yā Sīn chapter have a long his-

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[27] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 35b–37b.

[28] *Ibid.* 40a–b. The notion of light issuing forth from the head is reminiscent of an important dream attributed to Shaykh Ṣafī that was retained in Safavid dynastic histories (cf. Quinn, *Historical Writing* 69).

tory of use as protectors from harm, giving the hat a prophylactic function. Verses that mention God's face are placed on the most visible part of the hat, indicating an apposition between the face under the hat and the divine countenance. These verses also have a distinctly eschatological flavor, hinting at the role of the wearer as a soldier in the messiah's army that had already been established in the historical section of *Ṭarīq al-irshād*. Taken together, the inscriptions make the wearer appear as a close ally of God, protected by him and connected to him through cosmological attributes. The invocation of God's face is particularly significant in this regard since it seems to blur the boundary between the wearer as a representative of God versus a kind of actual representation of the divine in the flesh.

Following the description of inscriptions, Najafī moves to discussing qualities associated with the hat's physical make-up. In this vein, he indicates that its height represents rectitude. This then leads to a more thoroughgoing identification between the human body and the physical hat. Taking care of the hat is described as being equivalent to doing ablutions before the ritual prayer (*namāz*) and the hat is shown to have its own particular rituals that are seen like the rituals obligatory for human bodies. The physical elements that go into making the hat are procured from different parts of the earth and all crafts existing in society have as their ultimate end the production of the hat.[29] Just as Najafī's historical narrative and Qur'ānic inscriptions earlier made the hat's presence a fundamental continuity running through time and the internally connected cosmos, the descriptions given in this section make the physical object represent the material and socioeconomic spheres of existence. Cumulatively, then, the hat becomes the most central object in the cosmos, representing the fusing point of time, space, materiality, society, and phenomenological experience.

As to be expected, what I consider to be a careful and elaborate emplotment of the hat through various spheres of being leads eventually to religious and ethical prescriptions intended for the reader's future. The hat is declared obligatory for all human beings, an imperative whose fulfillment is the ultimate purpose of Tahmāsp's decree that impelled Najafī to write his treatise. The work ends in a series of commandments that describe the process of accepting the command of wearing the hat for oneself and then going on to live up to its significance. The wearing of the hat is described

[29] Najafī, *Ṭarīq al-irshād* 40b–41a.

as a lifelong and irreversible commitment, forsaking it thereafter being described as an apostasy that is liable to punishment by death.[30] The hat is to be accepted from a master, an act that is equivalent to becoming Muslim for the very first time. Recalling the verse inscribed on its top, to wear the hat is described as being enveloped in light. Once one accepts the hat, one must follow through by embarking on a program with forty-four steps (similar to the twelve pairs of attributes discussed above) through which one molds oneself into the ideal Ṣūfī. At the end of this process, only once one has lived up to the hat's obligations, one becomes a "poor person" (*faqīr*) who is entirely devoid of an ego-self (*nafs*). And finally, to believe in the hat, including the whole systematic exposition of its properties laid out in the treatise, represents the sole full realization of belief in God's oneness (*tawḥīd*), the ultimate obligation created beings owe to God.[31]

Headgear in Other Literature

The *Ṭarīq al-irshād* is exceptional in that the detail and scope of the object described in it go beyond any other work I have seen. However, as I have already mentioned, the work does bear a definite relationship to literature on *futuwwat* or *javānmardī*, the code of chivalry or young-manliness quite widespread in Islamic societies during the later medieval period. This literature has received considerable attention in recent scholarship, with particular focus on its capacity as a source for social and religious history.[32] A paradigmatic original work in this regard is the *Futuwwatnāma-yi Sulṭānī* by the influential late-Timurid author Ḥusayn Wāʿiẓ-i Kāshifī (d. 1504–5) that contains a lengthy chapter on articles of attire. Kāshifī's main emphasis is on the Ṣūfī and chivalrous cloak (*khirqa*), for which he provides a history, description of the upright behavior that must accompany the wearing of the cloak, qualities associated with different colors of cloth, and the allowable materials. His much shorter exposition on headgear describes "crowns" (*tāj*) made of various materials, constructions, and colors. While his list does mention a twelve-gore crown, his discussion of

[30] *Ibid.* 41b.

[31] *Ibid.* 42a–51a. The end of the manuscript is unreadable because of damage.

[32] For the most detailed studies see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*, Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism*, and Loewen, Proper Conduct (Adab) is Everything. I am grateful to remarks by Maria Subtelny for making this important connection.

the colors of headgear includes only white, black, green, blue, and natural (*khudrang*).[33] In addition to Kāshifī's work, a section of the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* bears close resemblance to the contents of two undated *futuwwat* works in Persian that comment on inscriptions to be found on the headgear.[34]

Najafī's explanations for the headgear in the *Ṭarīq al-irshād* are much more elaborate and extensive than those provided by Kāshifī and the anonymous authors. Moreover, whereas these other works aim to describe and prescribe a variety of different aspects adopted by those who join forms of *futuwwat*, Najafī is concerned with a single model that has universalistic significance and is tied to a particular moment in time. These differences mean that although works like that of Kāshifī may have acted as models and sources for Najafī, the overall intent and projection conveyed by the latter is of quite a different nature and order of magnitude.

In addition to literature related to *futuwwat*, the emphasis on distinctive headgear found in Najafī's work has parallels in Ṣūfī groups active in the early modern period as well. The most extensive evidence for this comes from the Ottoman realm, which shared many religious characteristics with its Safavid counterpart despite hostility between the two empires and the confessional division between Sunnī and Twelver Shīʿī polities. The Süleymaniye library in Istanbul possesses two manuscripts of a short work in Arabic devoted to a twelve-gore headgear that provides a mapping of reprehensible and praiseworthy attributes onto its parts that is similar (but not identical) to Najafī's description. The manuscript with the more extensive version of the work gives its title as *Sirr al-tāj*, attributing it to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Niʿmatullāhī and stating that the scribe copied it in Mecca from the shaykh's own copy in the year 996/1590–91. This version of the work ends with emphasis on the number twelve, asserting its auspiciousness by reference to the number of letters in the *shahāda*, the leaders of Banū Isrāʾīl, the Imāms, constellations, and springs that flowed forth when Moses struck the rock.[35] A second manuscript contains the same basic work except that the title is *Sirr al-tāj al-amjad*, the author is identified as Aḥmad al-Ilāhī, and the emphasis on the number twelve at the end is justified through reference to the *shahāda* alone.[36]

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[33] Kāshifī, *Futwwatnāma* 184, 193–195.

[34] Afshārī, *Futuwwatnāmahā* 115–116, 151–153.

[35] Niʿmatullāhī, *Sirr al-tāj* 197b. Mehmed Tahir Bursalı makes a very brief mention of a certain Niʿmatullah Efendi described as the author of *Menakib-i Emir Sultan* and *Risale-i tac ve hirka* (Bursalı, *Osmanlı müellifleri* i, 171). I have not been able to place this author besides this partial identification.

[36] Ilāhī, *Sirr al-tāj* 79b.

Further evidence of investment in headgear and other objects as primary symbolic carriers of identity and protection is also available from the Ottoman realm. For example, John Curry's recent study of the Khalwatiyya discusses short works dedicated to Ṣūfī headgear written between the middle and end of the sixteenth century. The context in this instance seems to have been attacks on the wearing of headgear as a deviant practice, which may have stemmed from a fear of Ottoman Ṣūfīs adopting Safavid practices. These works are geared substantially toward "explaining to the dervishes themselves the various forms of symbolism embedded in the characteristics of the Halveti dervish headgear and its various forms."[37] The inclusion of headgear on tombstones is also a widespread practice documented from the sixteenth century onward.[38] The most extensive known work dedicated to Ottoman headgear was composed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Exhibiting an encyclopedic rather than confessional spirit, this work describes and explains headgear particular to all the major Ṣūfi groups operating in the Ottoman empire.[39]

Symbolism and Materiality

Instead of a conclusion that summarizes the argument, I would like to end this essay by highlighting a revisionist proposal and an area of further inquiry that justify, in my view, regarding Najafī's *Ṭarīq al-irshād* as a particularly valuable work. Both these issues have something to do with the question of understanding the place of symbols in the performance as well as study of religious systems.

As I mentioned in the essay's introduction, recent studies have highlighted the fact that the religious imagination that can be attributed to prominent groups in the Turko-Iranian world during the early modern period contains a particular emphasis on seeing the material sphere as the stage for the enactment of religious dramas. This includes highly intellectual movements such as the Ḥurūfiyya that were dedicated to producing a rationalized account of the observable world as a mirror of higher truths. The Ḥurūfī intellectual system was tied to particular apocalyptic expecta-

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37 Curry, *Transformation* 178.

38 Cf. Eldem and Vatin, *L'épitaphe ottomane musulmane*, and İşli, *Ottoman Headgears*.

39 Cf. Anetshofer and Karateke, *Traktat*. In this context, it is also worth mentioning the Ottoman practice of manufacturing shirts inscribed with text that activate protection and symbolize various aspects of Islamic mythology with a particular emphasis on Ṣūfī ideas. For examples with descriptions see Tezcan, *Tılsımlı gömlekler*.

tions through which the ultimate destiny of the cosmos was to be enacted on the historical stage.[40] The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also saw the rise of various other messianic movements whose protagonists were invested in salvation through triumph in the material sphere.[41] The transformation of the Safavids from a Ṣūfī community to a dynasty was itself a part of this process and provides extensive evidence for the primacy of the material as the locus of religious investment.[42] As Azfar Moin's recent work has shown, Safavid and Mughal histories run quite parallel on this score and Indian sources also provide a wealth of evidence for heavy investment in the generation and elaboration of new symbols during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[43] The use of the headgear as the centerpiece of an elaborate and sophisticated theological vision with direct implications for action in the world marks Najafī's *Ṭarīq al-irshād* as part of the general trend toward 'materialized' religion. While this may be true in itself, the work's single-mindedness affords us the possibility of thinking through some of the implications of such a religious outlook more closely than has been the case to date. In this context, the comparison between Najafī's work and the focus on symbolism in the modern study of religion can lead to a helpful corrective.

I suggest that what characterizes the religious environment of the period 1400–1700 C.E. is not a greater concern with materiality as such but seemingly self-conscious investment in the traffic between symbols and materiality. The emphasis on materiality alone is incorrect (or at least inadequate) in that, in the final analysis, all religious systems that include rituals and symbols are rooted in materialized realities. What is distinctive about the religious environment that concerns us is thus not the fact that worldviews are any more 'exteriorized' into the material sphere but that authors and practitioners exhibit cognizance of and active appreciation for symbols as the 'stuff' from which religion is made.

To explain this point, it is helpful to lay out a fuller picture of the role assigned to symbols in the modern study of religion. First, as I stated in the beginning of the essay, the modern study of religion usually considers symbols central to all religious systems rather than differentiating between less

[40] For the most extensive account of the Ḥurūfī system see Mir-Kasimov, Étude de textes ḥurûfî anciens.

[41] Cf. Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*.

[42] The most detailed interpretation of the Safavids along these lines is Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*.

[43] Cf. Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

and more "materialized" religions. This is thought to be the case because of symbols' capacity to unite disparate intellectual and social aspects into singular entities that are deemed highly meaningful while retaining considerable ambiguity with respect to meanings and uses. For example, the crescent can act as a symbol of Islam in divergent ways and to different ends, including theological, sociopolitical, and identitarian deployments. Symbols such as the crescent can be referred to as 'summarizing' because, as Ortner writes, they "operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas . . . under a unitary form which . . . 'stands for' the system as a whole."[44] Such symbols can be contrasted with 'elaborating' key symbols, which can be directed either at conceptualizing or acting. Examples for the first include the living organism, such as the human body, that acts as a model for constructing the cosmos in a traditional context, or the machine, which does the same for modern industrial society. Both the body and the machine are thought of as conglomerations of parts whose working together provides a symbolic paradigm that maps to other arenas requiring conceptualization. In contrast, an elaborating key symbol directed toward acting provides a blueprint for "the culture's means-ends relationships in actable forms."[45] This category includes myths and allegories, rituals, and patterns of quotidian behavior that are valued and are continually reenacted. Examples here could be the narrative of the life of Muḥammad meant to act as guide for all Muslims, the hajj complex that is meant to enact fundamental religious relationships in the metaphysical as well as social sphere, and a value such as hospitality that is not tied to specific actions but is an overarching attitude woven into one's mode of life. A symbol that has an expansive range of meanings "extensively and systematically formulates relationships—parallels, isomorphisms, complementarities, and so forth—between a wide range of diverse cultural elements."[46] This multiplicity of effects allows symbols to convey multiple and even contradictory meanings without a sense of dissonance.

It is noteworthy that, from the perspective of a modern scholar, the efficacy of symbols does not presume a religious practitioner's self-conscious decision to become invested in the symbols. The scholar apprehends the symbols by working from surfaces inward, that is, by observing practitioners' speech and actions and then drawing correlations that reveal a

[44] Ortner, On Key Symbols 1340.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.* 1343.

supposed religious 'system' held together through symbols. Most often, the workings of the symbolic system are presumed to be opaque to the practitioners, and revealing these has the connotation of disenchanting the religious world by subjecting it to purely rational criteria. Symbols' power is thought to derive from their emotive and affective appeals rather than their places in reasoned analyses.

Now when we contrast this widespread theoretical understanding with Najafī's *Ṭarīq al-irshād* and the larger sociohistorical perspective it represents, we see the same concern with the headgear's "unique density of meaning"[47] that we note in modern scholarship on symbols. Although Najafī's ultimate purpose is to propound a theology, like a modern scholar, he derives the particulars of history, cosmology, and sociopolitical relations that matter to him by working from the surface of the headgear inward. The work's unrelenting focus is on turning an object into an all-pervasive symbol. It is to be granted, of course, that what he represents as a "decoding" of the object is in fact a theological "encoding" with a determined prescriptive agenda. In parallel, recent scholarship on the construction of the category religion has demonstrated extensively that modern scholars engaged in the study of the relevant phenomena can equally be shown to have "made" religion rather than discovering or describing it.[48]

My purpose in insisting on the striking parallels is not to erase completely the difference between the two outlooks involved but to point to a similarity in the epistemological framework that enables both perspectives. In his own projection, Najafī lays the headgear bare on the express command of the highest religious authorities. This is tied to a sociopolitical imperative—support for the Safavid dynasty—which he justifies in cosmic terms. The object at the center of the text acts as the material key within which we are presented a coincidence of history, transformative personal experience, and ethics. As modern scholars, we treat religious objects and ideas in a similar way, but with different sociopolitical imperatives deriving from intellectual frameworks that have other origins and ends. At the center of both systems lies conscious appreciation of symbols as powerful entities, in other words, the "symbolness" of symbols.

I will end by posing a historical question that presents intriguing possibilities but requires more extensive research. If we can be persuaded that religious transformations occurring in early modern Islamic societies

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[47] Struck, *Birth of the Symbol* 2.

[48] See, for example, Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

reflect an epistemological shift and that the change at issue bears a more than incidental resemblance to modern ways of interpreting religion, can the similarity be traced to incipient early modern intellectual trends that bridge the gap between Europe and the Middle East and Asia? I hasten to add that that I am raising this question in the spirit of promoting actual, detailed historical inquiry rather than romantic idealism of any kind or a misplaced sense of competition between Christianity and Islam. Recent publications in literary studies and forthcoming work on shared political cultures (with an emphasis on apocalypticism) argue as much, suggesting that we pay attention to commonality of patterns and look beyond the sense of absolute separation between geographical spheres.[49] It may be that the representations and distinctive epistemological framework of Najafī's *Ṭarīq al-irshād* provide us a window into this question from the side of religious scholarship, which most historians take to be more immune to change than other arenas of intellectual production in Islamic societies. But a fully convincing adjudication of the question requires evidence and analyses in articles and books that remain to be written.

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[49] Cf., Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, Subrahmanyam, Connected Histories, and forthcoming work by Cornell Fleischer.

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PERSIAN NUQṬAWĪS AND THE SHAPING OF THE DOCTRINE OF "UNIVERSAL CONCILIATION" (*ṢULḤ-I KULL*) IN MUGHAL INDIA

Abbas Amanat

The principle of "universal conciliation" (*ṣulḥ-i kull*), the core doctrine of the "Divine Religion" (*dīn-i ilāhī*) conceived under the Timurid ruler of India Jalāl al-Dīn Akbar (r. 1556–1605), has been the subject to a number of historical studies and diverse interpretations. It is praised by some as a genuine religious innovation but more often as an ephemeral royal cult contemplated in the inner circle of Akbar's influential minister, Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī, and his brother, the chief court poet Abū-l-Fayḍ Fayḍī. Little attention however has been paid to the make up of this circle and more specifically to the role of the agnostics, such as Nuqṭawī exiles from Iran and their advocacy of a post-Islamic millennial dispensation.[1]

Nuqṭawīs advanced a theory of mystical materialism and cyclical renewal that essentially called for a renewed humanist creed beyond the pale of Islamic dispensation. Almost exclusively consisted of Persian émigrés, refugees and self-exiles to India who escaped persecution in Safavid Iran, they were often depicted in the hostile sources under the general rubric of *mulḥids* (heretics; atheists; agnostics) and for obvious reasons their presence and influence were downplayed, and their traces were paled if not entirely wiped out by their contemporaries or by later Islamic sources.

Yet despite meager information about them, it is clear that the Nuqṭawī advocates, and more so the Nuqṭawī ideas, thrived in the multi-confessional environment of India as late as the 17th century where they remained part of the intellectual and literary landscape. Even after the execution of Prince Dārā Shikūh (1615–1659) and elimination of his cultural circle by his prevailing brother Aurangzeb (1658–1707), the Nuqṭawī beliefs seem to have lingered among the itinerant Khāksār dervish order in India and Iran

[1] For religious policy under Akbar and the emergence of *Dīn-i Ilāhī* see Ahmad, Dīn-i Ilāhī, Sharma, *The Religious Policy* 18–68, Roychoudhury, *The Dīn-i Ilāhī*, Ahmad, Akbar 21–38, and more recently Grobel, *Der Dichter*. Aziz Ahmad's assertion in his *EI*[2] entry that "the trend of recent scholarship is to treat the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* as a heresy within Islam, rather than a form of apostasy" is typical of the anxieties in the scholarship of Indian Islam which tends to view *Dīn-i Ilāhī* within tenets of Islam rather than a break from it.

and survived as defuse motifs in the poetry of the period. By the time the author of *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* rendered his relatively accurate account of Nuqṭawīs some time in the latter half of the 17th century, there were still Nuqṭawī leaders and followers in India. The author of *Dabistān*, presumably a follower of Ādhar Kaywān's neo-Zoroastrian school in India, or possibly his son, may very well have been in contact with the Dārā Shikūh circle where Nuqṭawīs were free to confess their beliefs. He interviewed six of them whom he identified by name. Among whom there are four "trustees" (*umanā'*), which in turn suggests the existence of a Nuqṭawī network.[2]

It may also be argued that the rise of the neo-Ṣūfī conservatism in the latter part of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century in part was because of the popularity of Nuqṭawī and similar heresies in the Indian subcontinent. The conservative, even puritanical, theology of *waḥdat-i shuhūd* (unity of vision), a transcendental interpretation of divinity as being completely distinct from human existence, advanced by the well-known Naqshbandī theologian Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) and his followers. Reassertion of the Islamic *sharīʿa* under emperor Aurangzeb was in large part inspired by Sirhindī's teachings in responses to the prevalence of the doctrines of the "unity of being" (*waḥdat-i wujūd*). At least since the 13th century the doctrine of "unity of being" was favored among majority of Ṣūfī thinkers in the Persianate world. In its extreme form, this doctrine was close to the Nuqṭawī theory of "pointism" (from the term *nuqṭa*: point as the building block of man and universe) and its corollary, the doctrine of the universal conciliation (*ṣulḥ-i kull*).[3]

Rise of the *sharīʿa*-dominated Shīʿism in Safavid Iran from the first quarter of the 16th century on the other hand and sporadic persecution of nonconformists of all sorts, as has been recorded from the early part of the 17th century, drove off a large number of mystics, poets, philosophers and artists with libertarian affinities to neighboring Ottoman and Mughal

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[2] *Dabistān*. Eighth chapter (*taʿlīm-i hashtum*) deals with the Nuqṭawīs who are identified as Wāḥidiyya. For the author of *Dabistān* see Mojtaba'i, Dabestān who identifies him as Mīr Dhulfiqār Ardistānī better known as Mullā Mo'bad or Mo'badshāh. This identification however has been soundly rejected (along with earlier erroneous identifications) by R. Riḍāzāda Malik in his scholarly edition of *Dabistān* ii, 9–76. He identifies Kaykhusraw Isfandīyār son of Ādhar Kaywān the only possible author. Such proposal, if can be proven beyond doubt, confirms close relations between Nuqṭawīs and Ādhar Kaywānīs in India.

[3] For significance of *nuqṭa* (point) in Nuqṭawī doctrine see Amanat, Nuqṭawī Movement 284–289. Recent studies on Sirhindī suggest that even Sirhindī was preoccupied with millenarian themes. See below.

empires. More specifically, there were at least two rounds of widespread persecution of Nuqṭawīs, known as "heretic-killing" (*mulḥid-kushī*); the first c. 1575–76, toward the end of Tahmāsp's reign (r. 1524–76) and after a respite, the second round under ʿAbbās I (r. 1588–1629) between 1590 and 1592 at the turn of the Islamic millennium.[4]

Nuqṭawīs in Mughal India

It goes without saying that the prosperous and religiously tolerant Timurid court of India, and its provincial vassalages and autonomous principalities that were not yet incorporated into Mughal Empire, offered luring alternatives to the suffocating conformity in Safavid Iran. The flight of intellectual and artistic talents contributed to the impoverishment of the Safavid intellectual milieu and helped to reinforce conformity in the public sphere, as for instance in the philosophical discourse of the Iṣfahān school, and even in the much praised artistic and literary circles of the late Safavid era. With the growth of *ḥadīth* studies, most notably under Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and his students in the latter half of the 17th and early 18th centuries, the jurists increased their attack on the Ṣūfīs and the philosophers (*ḥukamāʾ*). Pressure on the antinomian literati in turn encouraged practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) as a defensive posture not only in the hostile neighboring Sunnī lands but more commonly at home in the public sphere, what is often defined as the *ẓāhir*. The madrasa and teaching circles, the royal court, the coffee houses and even the virtual space of literary biographical dictionaries (*tadhkira*s) were to comply with the unwritten code of disguise. Instances of purging Nuqṭawī heretics was an important turning point in the emergence of what may be defined as the Safavid "persecuting society." The joint forces of the state and the clerical establishment were potent enough to quash, even uproot, intellectual dissent especially if it involved religious skepticism and freethinking.[5]

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[4] For persecution under the Safavids see Amanat, Nuqṭawī Movement 289–95, and *idem*, *Apocalyptic Islam* 83–89. See also below.

[5] I borrowed "*persecuting society*" from Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*. Though Moore's thesis drew criticism from European medievalists (see for example Laursen and Nedermann, *Beyond the Persecuting Society*), the core idea remains viable when applied to societies governed by a defining belief system that sharpens the notion of "self" versus the "other." See also Zagorin, *Religious Toleration*, especially chapter One. Late Safavid Iran and to a large extent the 19th century Qajar Iran lend themselves well to the concept when a state-clergy symbiosis rigorously searched for a internal "other" to be

As with all historical records of the nonconformists and agnostics here too in the case of Nuqṭawīs in the 16th and 17th centuries the sources are enigmatic though not entirely silent about the victims and their fates. The Nuqṭawī flight to Mughal India offered a level of security that made it safe to divulge their true antinomian beliefs. We can identify by name at least thirty six individuals as Nuqṭawīs and probably about a dozen more who were suspected of Nuqṭawī affiliation. Such a meager database (mostly put together thanks to Ṣādiq Kiyā's pioneering work in the 1950's),[6] is nevertheless significant. It represents, we can safely argue, the leadership of the movement, or at least its intellectual elite in the last quarter of the 16th century between 1570's and 1600's.

Of the thirty two identified Nuqṭawīs in the Iranian and Perso-Indian sources a majority of them are categorized as poets, artists, philosophers, physicians or simply as wandering dervishes (*darwīsh*). In addition to these individuals there were Nuqṭawī followers in the cities, among artisans, marginalized groups often coded as "riff raffs" (*asāfil wa adānī*), some of them coming curiously from among the Safavid Qizilbāsh. In the countryside, especially in the villages in northern-central Iran around Kāshān, Naṭanz and Iṣfahān there was also a Nuqṭawī grass-roots support. The Nuqṭawī geographical distribution however was wider than Iraq ʿAjam and Iṣfahān regions and included Qazwīn, Shīrāz, Yazd, Nīshāpūr, some semi-rural communities in Māzandarān, and in Azerbaijan. Though we know little about the identity of converts beyond Safavid Iran and in Mughal court, it is not unlikely that Nuqṭawī itinerant dervishes, patronized by influential figures in royal court, found followers in Kashmir and elsewhere or in some semi-autonomous principalities within the Mughal empire.

Remarkably, about half of the identified Nuqṭawīs, seventeen of them, either fled from Safavid persecution or else voluntarily left for India.[7] Of the other half that stayed behind, twelve were perished; either executed as *mulḥids* by government agents (some personally in the hand of ʿAbbās I)

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differentiated and persecuted in order to solidify a Shīʿī conforming community. See also Amanat, Iranian Identity Boundaries 13–20, and *idem*, Historical Roots, especially 180–181.

[6] Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān*.

[7] The number of the Nuqṭawīs who left for India is based on my sifting through Kiyā's *Nuqṭawiyān*, which still remains the most comprehensive assessment of primary sources on the Nuqṭawīs. In his article Nuqṭawiya, Dhakāwatī-Qaraguzlū arrives at number fifteen (though he fails to cite Kiyā as his primary source). Oddly enough Sharīf Āmulī, the most prominent of Iranian Nuqṭawīs in India, is missing from his list.

and others killed by the mob. Of the remaining three, one was blinded and only two were saved after they repented. In a few cases, executions were endorsed by jurists but in other cases the killings were apparently the outcome of the Shāh ʿAbbās's own initiative and as a reaction to fear of a Nuqṭawī-provoked uprising at the turn of the Islamic millennium (1591–92).[8]

Such a terrible end may explain meager presence of Nuqṭawīs and their sympathizers in the Safavid sources. Even in Mughal India the Nuqṭawīs were not free from criticism, denouncements and persecution by the Sunnī *ʿulamāʾ*. They soon learned however to blend in with the nondescript wandering dervishes and to attach themselves to the less-strict Ṣūfī orders rather than to establish a distinct identity of their own as an organized community. Nuqṭawism, as a millennial movement after the 1600's thus remained just that; a defuse agnostic, anthropocentric, post-Islamic tendency dormant in the Ṣūfī milieu of India with converts that are difficult to identify except from their communal associations or their utterances especially through poetry.

Mīr Sharīf Āmulī and Doctrine of Universal Conciliation

At the height of the movement in the late 16th century we can detect a number of influential Nuqṭawīs figures in the court of Akbar and the circle surrounding his celebrated minister Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī. Perhaps the most well-known Nuqṭawī sympathizer is the celebrated court poet ʿUrfī Shīrāzī who having been accused of heresy, apparently because of his earlier association with the Nuqṭawī leader, Abū-l-Qāsim Amrī, during a Nuqṭawī uprising in Shīrāz. He fled his homeland for India while Amrī stayed behind and perished. As a protégé of Fayḍī, ʿUrfī soon gained fame as probably the greatest poet of the so-called "Indian School" (*sabk-i hindī*) but died prematurely in 1590.[9] Of implicit affiliation with Nuqṭawīs we may also identify Ḥakīm Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī, an influential physician, literary figure, and confidant of Akbar who was a patron of ʿUrfī and a

[8] For persecution under the Safavids see Amanat, Nuqṭawī Movement 289–95 (Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam* 73–89) and cited sources. See also Babayan, *Mystics* 57–117.

[9] Badāʾūnī, *Muntakhab* iii, 195–96. As it is his habit to scandalize Iranian nonconformists, Badāʾūnī speaks of ʿUrfī with great contempt but he only mentions his association with other skeptics and agnostics such as Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī. For his association with Amrī see for instance sources cited in Dhakawatī-Qaraguzlū, Nuqṭawiya 160. See also Losensky, ʿOrfi Širazi, which makes a brief reference to antinomian proclivities of ʿUrfī's poetry.

few other Iranian Nuqṭawīs. Badāʾūnī, the rigid Sunnī court historian of Akbar, reproaches Gīlānī for his "agnosticism and other disdainful habits" though praises his sharp mind and his literary accomplishments.[10] Also of significance is the poet Mīr ʿAlī Akbar Tashbihī Kashānī who is identified as an itinerant *qalandar* of a humble origin. In dervish guise he visited Akbar's court a number of times to promote the Nuqṭawī cause. As Badāʾūnī informs us, Tashbihī was instrumental in persuading Akbar in a *qaṣīda* to "remove the creed of those who follow emulation (*taqlidiyān*) so that truth arrives at its focal point and (only) pure unity (*tawḥīd-i khāliṣ*) endures."[11]

Yet the most well-known Nuqṭawī activist in India by far is Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Āmulī, a mystic of some weight who moved to India and soon became prominent enough in Akbar's court to play a part in multi-confessional debates that led to declaration of 987/1579 (*maḥḍar* lit. the [royal] presence but here came to mean petition or declaration) announcing Akbar's infallibility as a temporal ruler, a major step toward later emergence of *Dīn-i Ilāhī*. The gathering in the *ʿIbādat-khāna* (lit. house of worship) established by Akbar and his two major advisors: Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī and Fayḍī, and often in the presence of Akbar was devoted to free theological debates and setting broad religious guidelines. This was a remarkable forum for exchanges among the Sunnīs and Shīʿīs as well as later among them and the Jewish rabbis, Parsi Zoroastrian mobads, Buddhist monks, Hindu Brahmans, Jain priests, Sikh gurus, Portuguese Jesuits, as well as antinomians of different sort including the Nuqṭawīs and followers of Ādhar-Kaywānī neo-Zoroastrianism. Āmulī may even have been a major impetus behind the subsequent oath of allegiance in 1001/1581 to the "four degrees" that formally initiated the practice of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* (or the *Ilāhiya* creed according to the author of *Dabistān*) and implementing the doctrine of *ṣulḥ-i kull*.[12]

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[10] Badāʾūnī, *Montakhab* iii, 115. See also collection of Gīlānī's letters, *Ruqa'āt*, and editor's long introduction, *ibid.* i–xxxvii. This collection contains a number of letters to Mīr Sharīf Āmulī (see below) and other Nuqṭawī affiliates whereby he offers his moral and financial support for them.

[11] Badāʾūnī, *Montakhab* iii, 142. See Also Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 52 citing a quartet by Tashbihī in *Khulāṣat al-ashʿār* with *qalandari* connotation:

I am a sea of generosity, the weight of whose largess should I bear?
I am engrossed in nothingness, whose existence should I utter?
They say bow we must before the Truth (*Ḥaqq*, i.e. God),
But since I became all the Truth, to whom should I bow?

[12] For a thorough but slightly outdated study of Akbar's religious initiatives see Roychoudhury *The Din-i Ilahi*, 4th ed., especially chapter VI, 140–171, where the author offers a descriptive chronology of Akbar's religious policies that ultimately came to be known as

Āmulī had left Iran before the 1576 Nuqṭawī persecution presumably "out of fear of antagonism of the jurists of his time" (*az bīm-i maḍarrat-i fuqahā-yi ʿaṣr*). He spent some time probably as an itinerant dervish in an unspecified Ṣūfī convent (*khāniqāh*) in Balkh, then moved to the court of the Sulṭānate of Deccan and then to the Sulṭānate of Malwa in central northern India just after Akbar conquered it. Yet each time he was driven out of his refuge because of expressing heretical views. An entry in the Indo-Persian biographical dictionary *Maʾathir al-umarāʾ* informs us that he was extremely well versed in the sciences of his own time as well as in Ṣūfism and in what is defined as "truths" (*ḥaqāʾiq*; a code word for Nuqṭawī beliefs) which he combined with "heretical and agnostic ideas" (*ilḥād wa zandaqa*) so as to pronounce "pantheistic beliefs and proclaim that all [humans] are Allāh" (*daʿwī-yi hamih ūst mīkard wa hamih-ra Allāh mīguft*).[13]

Upon Āmulī's arrival in the Mughal court in 984/1576, he was acclaimed as a great scholar and was given an audience with Akbar. Advocating alternative religious views, possibly with a post-Islamic proclivity, soon he was ranked among Akbar's close advisors. *Maʾathir al-umarā* informs us that since at the time he became aware of the popularity of the doctrine of *ṣulḥ-i kull* and "doctrinal openness" (*wusʿat-i mashrab*), he persuaded Akbar that "kingship is a reflection of the divine authority (*rububiyat*), thus such emanation should not be confined to a specific group [i.e. the Muslim subjects] but all peoples of diverse creeds (*mukhtalif al-aḥwāl*) and of shifting circumstances (*mutalawwin al-aḥwāl*) should benefit from it (and hence) differences of religions should not be a divisive factor."[14]

Sharīf Āmulī's assertion in the course of a debate with the Sunnī *ʿulamāʾ* further reaffirmed the Mughal emperor millennial presumptions. According to *Dabistān* in a place identified as Dibalpur (possibly Jibalpour) Āmulī openly defended the doctrine of Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī and

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Dīn-i Ilāhī. A major shortcoming of this otherwise well researched study is a general disregard for the role of the antinomians in the Mughal court and more specifically the importance of millenarian themes in abrogating the Islamic *sharīʿa*. Though he relies heavily on *Dabistān*, Roychoudhury systematically omits references to Nuqṭawīs, Ādhar-Kaywānīs and other trends that were well appreciated by ʿAllāmī, his brother and his father Mubārak, as well as other agnostic figures in the court. He only makes a passing reference to Sharīf Āmulī for instance and does not discuss the origins and development of the doctrine of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. Yet as a timely response to prevalent view offered by earlier interpretation of Akbar's religion (e.g. Smith, *Akbar*) it sets the ground for a balanced understanding of Akbar and his religion.

[13] Shāhnawāz Khān, *Maʾathir* iii, 285, cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 45. See also Athar Ali, Sharīf Āmulī, and cited sources.

[14] *Ibid.*

"convinced" his *'ulamā'* opponents.[15] Though the proceedings of this debate is yet unknown, this is indeed the clearest indication in the contemporary sources of Āmulī's advocacy of a post-Islamic dispensation. Yet in the aftermath of the same debate, as it was noted by the biographical dictionary *Ma'athir al-umarā*, Āmulī was compelled by his opponents to "give pledges" (*ilzām-hā dād*), presumably not to advocate the Nuqṭawī cause anymore. If this was the case, such a commitment did not seem to have concerned Akbar. The *Ma'athir al-umarā'* following *Dabistān* further asserts that the Mughal ruler "did not turn away his favorable sight from Āmulī but [rather] enhanced his [financial] stature."[16]

Of particular interest in the above accounts is the clear link between Āmulī's pantheistic views—or more specifically his anthropocentric mystical beliefs—which was at the core of the Nuqṭawī pointist cosmology—and the pluralist idea that people of all creeds and all intellectual orientations are to be reconciled and treated equally; in other words the very essence of the idea of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. The use of the Persian expression: *hama-ūst* (lit. "all is Him") moreover implies a new Persian-inspired interpretation of pantheism that was apparently coined, or made current, by Āmulī instead of the common Arabic concept of "unity of being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This neology may be taken as another indication of the Nuqṭawīs' effort to constitute a Persianized mystical philosophy independent from the Islamic Ṣūfī discourse.[17]

Akbar as a manifestation of the divine authority echoed in a novel way the ancient Persian theory of kingship, and more specifically was reminiscent (as many other traits in Nuqṭawīsm) of the ancient Persian notion of charisma (*farr*) and the king as shadow of God on earth. Along with it, the Persian theory of the just treatment of all subjects was also given an unprecedented twist. As apparent in Āmulī's statement, equality of believers of all religions and all intellectual trends seem to have preoccupied pantheists and freethinkers like him. The title of one of his books, *Tarashshuḥ-i ẓuhūr* (emanation of manifestation), now presumably lost, may imply the same principle of pointism that embraces all humanity regardless of religious creed. In the same spirit, the reverential reference in *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* portrays him as a "unitarian" (*muwaḥḥid*); an allusion

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[15] *Dabistān* 324.

[16] Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'athir* iii, 285. Cf. *Dabistān* 324.

[17] Persian and Perso-Indian dictionaries that I consulted have no trace of such expression. Neither al-Ṭahānawī, *Kashshāf*, nor Sajjādī, *Farhang* have a reference to *hamih ūst*, though through reading of Ṣūfī texts may offer clues.

to the Nuqṭawī idea of the unity of creation and the human beings' monistic essence.[18]

Āmulī's views, it should be understood, was in harmony with the great Indian religious synthesis of the time both in the Muslim and Hindu circles. Earlier, syncretistic religious reformers such as Ramananda, Kabir and Guru Nanak in the 15th and early 16th centuries attempted to harmonize Vedantic Hinduism with Ṣūfism. Traces of the ancient Buddhist-Hindu materialist philosophy Charvaka may have also found its way to speculations of Hindu rationalist school in early modern era. *Dabistān* offers a convincing picture of how such trends were still accessible to people from different religious walks of life. Moreover, Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of ontological monism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) was highly popular with Indian Ṣūfis of the late medieval and early modern period; among others by Akbar's own Persian teacher, Mīr ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, and later by one of his spiritual guides, Shaykh Mubārak, and Mubārak's two sons Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī and Abū-l-Fayḍ Fayḍī. It was indeed very probable that the notion of *ṣulḥ-i kull* (if not the terminology) first originated in Ibn al-ʿArabī's theory of common divine origin of all religions. Their apparent diversity, he argued, was the outcome of periodic shift in divine self-revelation (*tajallī*) at any time point.[19]

Āmulī's contribution to the discourse of ecumenical reconciliation may very well be seen on two areas, which are somewhat distinct from earlier theories of government. On the one hand, he may have articulated the notion of *ṣulḥ-i kull* beyond its mystical connotation to something of a political statement. He may have also been instrumental in tying the doctrine of universal conciliation to the rule of Akbar as a millennial king-prophet who initiated a new anthropocentric cycle. As with regard to the first point, it is not without reason that the principle of *ṣulḥ-i kull* was first reported in 989/1581 in a letter written presumably on behalf of Akbar by his counselor Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī to Sharīf Āmulī whereby "universal peace" is defined as "accommodating oneself to people, good and bad, and regarding oneself, with one's all defects, as a necessary part of this

[18] Athar Ali, translates the term as "monotheistic" which seems inaccurate given Āmulī's agnosticism. The Nuqṭawīs are also referred to as Wāḥidīs (uniterians; from *wāḥid*: one) as for instance in *Dabistān.* The only extant manuscript of Sharīf Āmulī in Iranian libraries, *Sharḥ-i qaṣīda, Su'alāt*, may throw new light on his philosophical orientation.

[19] See for instance Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds* 123–76, which is based on Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya.*

[whole] world."[20] Here the Ṣūfī pantheistic perspective is well evident, devoid of any absolute value of good and evil. Gīlānī's letters to Āmulī, and to other dignitaries, confirm not only close doctrinal ties between these two Persian émigré in the Mughal service, but the existence of a network of likeminded freethinkers at odds with the Mughal Sunnī orthodox establishment on the issue of universal reconciliation.[21]

The second point concerns the time and circumstance of the declaration. We know that Akbar's *ṣulḥ-i kull* proclamation came after his dissociation from Islamic *sharīʿa* in the aftermath of the crucial theological debates in 987/1579. In his innovative *ʿIbādat-khāna* the doctrine of *ṣulḥ-i kull* seems to have taken its final shape. Prominently present in this debates were Shaykh Mubārak, Fayḍī and Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī. Despite holding high offices and despite their close proximity to Akbar, the three—the father and his two sons—have already been condemned by Sunnī jurists for their alleged heretical beliefs. While Mubārak was earlier accused of the Mahdawiyya messianic heresy, the poet laurite Fayḍī and the chief minister ʿAllāmī, were strongly denounced for their agnostic propensity; a charge routinely brought against them by such enemies as Badāʾūnī.

Badāʾūnī's extremely disparaging remarks about Mubārak, who earlier served as the his patron, and about Mubārak's sons and their supporters in the Mughal court, point to a deep anxiety for the loss of the Sunnī position vis-à-vis freethinking faction among whom there were crypto-Nuqṭawīs such as Āmulī and advocates of Ādhar Kaywān. Akbar's shift from Islamic *sharīʿa* to the ecumenical *ṣulḥ-i kull*, though never concrete and conceptually articulate, was keenly connected to the millennial spirit of the time; a spirit shared not only by the Nuqṭawīs in Mughal court but curiously by Badāʾūnī as well. Badāʾūnī's unpublished "mystical" writings reveals that he too, despite his merciless attacks on the heretics associated with the ʿAllāmī's camp, himself entertained millennial convictions. His reverence for the two 15th century messianic figures: Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, the founder of the Nūrbakhshī movement originated in Iran, and Mahdī of Jowanpur, the founder of the Mahdawiya in India, and his

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[20] Athar Ali, Ṣulḥ-i kull. The author does not specify the source for Akbar's letter. Same as Roychoudhury, Athar Ali too holds that Akbar's teacher, Mīr ʿAbd al-Laṭīf was responsible for introduction of the concept to the Mughal ruler. Evidence about *ṣulḥ-i kull* in Persian literature is mostly from the 18th century as for instance in a verse by Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī who resided in India. In the Persian dictionary *Ghiyāth al-lughat*, produced in India, *ṣulḥ-i kull* is associated with the Muwaḥḥids, which is synonymous with the Nuqṭawīs.

[21] Gīlānī, *Ruqaʾāt*, contains two letters to Āmulī (no. 54, p. 127 and no. 65, p. 150). Both letters denote close friendship between the two yet neither one have unambiguous reference to such issues as *ṣulḥ-i kull.*

sympathetic treatment of doctrine of transmigration among the Ahl-i Ḥaqq (also shared by the Nuqṭawīs), no doubt complicate his recognized status as the voice of conservative Sunnī orthodoxy.[22]

Likewise, a few of the Persian correspondence (*maktūbāt*) of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, the prominent Muslim Sunnī Naqshbandī theologian of Akbar's era and the initiator of what posthumously came to be known as the revivalist Mujaddidī movement, also reveals a degree of proclivity toward messianic trends at the turn of the Islamic millennium. His earlier career in the Akbar's court in the late 1580's and early 1590's no doubt must have exposed him to antinomian themes as he witnessed the declaration of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. As a protégé of Fayḍī it is difficult to believe that he was opposed to *Dīn-i Ilāhī* even if he was not its advocate either. Later his stern *sharīʿa*-oriented Ṣūfism, after his conversion to the Naqshbandī order, should be seen as a direct reaction to this early experience. His preoccupation in his *maktūbāt* with the prevailing disbelief (*kufr*) may also be taken as a reference not only to the Hindus, Parsis, Jews and Christian missionaries in the Mughal court who stood to benefit from *ṣulḥ-i kull* doctrine, but more so to the philosophers and the atheists (*mulḥid*s and *zindīq*s). Even study of rational sciences, among them geometry, and study of such benign works of Persian literature as Saʿdī's *Gulistān* and *Būstān* rendered harmful to true adherence to Islam.

In a long letter to two sons of his Ṣūfī teacher, Bāqī Billāh, one example among many in his Persian letters, Sirhindī reiterates compliance with the *sharīʿa* as mandatory for the true seeker of the Ṣūfī path and attacks the philosophers, agnostics and infidels for liberating themselves from *sharīʿa*, prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and even the conventional notions of divinity. He denies them eternal salvation despite their this-worldly success and affluence. Relying on Ibn al-ʿArabī, moreover, the differentiation between the theory of "unity of being" (*waḥdat-i wujud*) and his concept of "unity of appearance" *wahdat-i shuhūd* becomes blurred and inconspicuous as he strives to reconcile his own puritanical approach with monistic Ṣūfism.[23]

What survived from his early experience, however, was a millenarian presumption. He repeatedly insinuated in his letters to the "renovator of the second millennium" (*mujadd-i alf-i thānī*) as a veiled reference to his own spiritual status. Inspired by Ibn al-ʿArabī's discourse of renewal, a

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[22] I am grateful to Professor Azfar Moin for generously sharing observation concerning Badā'ūnī's mystical beliefs. See Moin, Challenging Mughal Emperor 390–400.

[23] *Muntakhabāt*, i: 266, pp. 142–175. For Sirhindī and his evolving image see for example Friedman, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī* and his entry Aḥmad Serhendī (1) and Giordani, Aḥmad Serhendī (2), in *EIr* and cited sources.

borrowing which he shared with Fayḍī and with the post-Islamic skeptics in Akbar's court, Sirhindī's implicit claim nevertheless was new within the sphere of *sharīʿa*-abiding Ṣūfism of his time. Even though the notion of a centennial renovator (*mujaddid-i raʾs-i miʾa*) probably did exist earlier, the idea of a millennial renovator with a semi-prophetic mission at the turn of the Islamic millennium should be viewed as a legacy of the Nuqṭawīs and like-minded agnostics who first advocated the termination of the Islamic cycle. Such an influence naturally was to be glossed over by Sirhindī himself and by the later Mujaddidī promoters.

What sharply distanced Sirhindī and Badāʾūnī from the discourse of *ṣulḥ-i kull* and its advocates however was the latter's unequivocal advocacy of a fresh ecumenical order at the turn of the Islamic millennium. During the auspicious reign of Akbar as a new king-prophet the advocates of *Dīn-i Ilāhī* (the divine creed) not only called for toleration toward all creeds as equal and as divinely inspired but in effect anticipated the end to the Islamic supremacy, or the Arab cycle (*dawr-i ʿArab*) as Nuqṭawī teaching had it. It was expected that in this unique experience in Islamic history (perhaps only comparable to the 10th century Qarmaṭī republic in Aḥsāʾ and Bahrain) the new creed supersede Islam's eternal prevalence as a perfect divine order. This was the bone of contention between the Islamic and supra-Islamic tendencies in Akbar's court and further in the religious milieu of Mughal India for another half century after him.

That ʿAllāmī and his camp held the upper hand in the final years of Akbar's rule (and before ʿAllāmī's assassination in 1601, the outcome of a plot contrived by prince Salīm who eventually succeeded his father as Jahāngīr in 1605) may indicate that hostility expressed by Badāʾūnī and his cohorts in part was tainted by the inner court rivalry. Judging by part three of Badāʾūnī's history, where the author provided a biographical dictionary of major literary and religious figures of his time, one may also sense an ethnic tension between the indigenous scholars from India and the émigré Iranian scholars who despite their often unorthodox beliefs were favored by Akbar and his minister ʿAllāmī. In part two of his history Badāʾūnī only briefly records Mīr Sharīf Āmulī's arrival in Akbar's court in a highly offensive tone. In part three he does not even spare him a short entry in his biographical dictionary. Likewise other Iranian dissenters with suspect heretical affinity don't fair any better.[24]

[24] See Badāʾūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 170–712, where he renders a sarcastic portrayal of Āmulī. Under Sarmadī Iṣfahānī, presumably another Nuqṭawī suspect, Āmulī is only mentioned

Islamic Millennium and the Divine Creed

Beyond divisions in Akbar's court over the interpretation of the millennium, there is a chronological puzzle to be resolved about the timing of the declaration of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*. The year 990/1582, when the declaration was issued, still was a decade too soon for the Islamic millennium in 1000 AH (1591–92) and thus early to engender a momentum in the Akbar's court. The answer may be in the way the beginning of the Islamic millennium was calculated by the Nuqṭawī millenialists. Although from the early Islamic centuries the Hijra (622 CE) was universally held as the start of the Islamic calendar, it was not always held as the start of Muḥammad's mission. Rather, it is likely that the Islamic millennium was calculated from the beginning of Muḥammad's mission in circa 610 CE, about a decade before the Hijra. This way the end of the Islamic millennium corresponded to the year 988/1580–81, the date that witnessed the beginning of Akbar's post-Islamic creed and his proclamation that he is a king-prophet.

Yet we know from *Tārīkh-i Alfī*, the millennial history that was commissioned by Akbar in 993/1585, and from other historical sources of the period, that Akbar appointed a committee of historians to accomplish the task. They were instructed to consider the death of the Prophet in the year 10/632 (rather than the Hijra or the start of Muḥammad's mission) as the starting point and the basis for all calendric calculation throughout. This millennial history was to abrogate (*naskh*) all earlier histories. According to this starting date, the Islamic millennium corresponds to the year 1010/1601, sixteen years after the commission date of 993/1585.[25]

The very composition of the *Alfī* history and the heated debates between the Shīʿī and Sunnī historians concerning the events in the early Islamic history (that cost the life of its chief author and editor-in-chief, Qāḍī Aḥmad Tatawī), was a remarkable evidence of the millennial momentum in Akbar's court. One of several scholars contributing to *Tārīkh-i Alfī* was the celebrated scientists and mathematician, Mīr Fatḥullāh Shīrāzī, who

in passing (*idem* iii, 169). Ḥakīm Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī (*idem* iii, 115), the influential advisor to Akbar does not receive any kinder treatment. Yet a close reading of *Muntakhab*, and especially part three, may reveal much about suspect Nuqṭawīs and other heretics of the time.

[25] The year 1010 also corresponded to the beginning of the 17th century in the Christian Gregorian calendar; a fact that no doubt was known to Akbar and people in his court given the presence of the Jesuit missionaries in the Mughal court. This conjunction may have encouraged calendric and astrological computations in order to advance Akbar's Divine Religion beyond the pale of Islam as a universal creed.

was responsible for the adoption of the Divine calendar (*Tārīkh-i Ilāhī*). The new solar calendar was identical with the Persian Jalali calendar of the Saljuqid era, devised by the celebrated ʿUmar Khayyām, and itself based on the Zoroastrian pre-Islamic calendar. It celebrated not only Nowrūz at the start the vernal equinox but other Persian monthly Zoroastrian holy days. Change of the calendar from lunar Islamic to solar Persian was a clear marker of the end of the Islamic era. Initiated in the year 992/1584, the Year One in this new *Ilāhī* calendar predated to the accession of Akbar in year 963/1556. A remarkable mathematician and inventor, Shīrāzī's post-Islamic calendar betrayed an obvious Nuqṭawī propensity which is also evident in his other astrological speculations and scholarly production.[26]

Astrological calculation may indeed be an important impetuous for the rise of earliest millennial anxieties. As mentioned above, it was five years before declaration of the *ṣulḥ-i kull* that the first anti-Nuqṭawī campaign began in 983/1575–76 in Safavid Iran presumably as the Nuqṭawīs began to calculate the end of the "Arab cycle" (*dawr-i ʿArab*) and beginning of the "Persian cycle" (*dawr-i ʿAjam*). It was these millennial activities, and the anxieties they stirred among the Shīʿī authorities in Iran, that in the first place had brought Āmulī to India. A striking number of measures adopted in the years preceding and after the year 1000 in Mughal India pointed at a deliberate attempt to break away from Islam.[27]

Millennial anxieties of a different sort were also evident in the Safavid court. In 1001/1593–94 the royal astrologer Jalāl al-Dīn Munajjim Yazdī recommended that in order to avoid the ominous influence of a comet that appeared on that year, ʿAbbās I should temporarily abdicate his throne. Consequently Darwīsh Yūsuf Tarkishdūz, a leader of the Iṣfahān Nuqṭawīs, was persuaded to ascend the throne on 9 August 1593 to sustain the bad omen. He was deposed three days later and executed by the order of the Shah. The disturbing episode, even if the comet ever appeared and even if the victim was lured to condone his fatal end, contains untold dimensions

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[26] See Introduction to the last part of Tatawī, *Tārīkh-i Alfī* 13–39. To add to the calendric complexity, we may speculate that the starting date for computing the new millennium was based on the astrological time cycles current in the Mughal court rather than on the Islamic *Hijra* or the beginning of Muḥammad's revelation. The astrological triplicity shift (combination of three signs of the zodiac) in 571 CE was the starting point for 240 or 360 solar calendar year cycles (rather than Islamic lunar calendar). According to this calculation the millennium occurs in 1571, ten years before the above 988/1580–81 date. I am thankful to Dr. Eva Orthmann for drawing my attention to this astrological feature. See also her Circular Motions 101–15.

[27] For a full account see Roychoudhury, *Din-i Ilahi.*

unknown to the posterity. Whatever they were, the episode served as a clever ploy to destroy the Nuqṭawī network and start off a mass execution of the heretics.[28]

A reference to Sharīf Āmulī's role in predicting a millennial manifestation also appears in Badā'ūnī's *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*. Here he states that Āmulī furnished evidence based on the prophecies of Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī that in "the year 990 (1582) a certain person will be the eradicator of the falsehood (*bardarandih-yi bāṭil shakhsī khwāhad būd*)." According to Badā'ūnī, Āmulī had identified this "certain person" with the Mughal ruler Akbar whose numerological equivalent in abjad system presumably was 990.[29]

Also influential in Akbar's declaration was another Iranian Nuqṭawī refugee known as Khwāja Mawlānā Shīrāzī, who seems to have also belonged to the circle of Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī. A specialist of the Science of Letters (*ʿilm al-jafr*), he offered to Akbar a treatise, which he claimed was from the Sharīf of Mecca, in which, at the basis of the Islamic *ḥadīth*, it was predicted that the doomsday and the advent of the Mahdī at the end of the seventh millennium from the time of Adam is impending. Corresponding to Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī's super-cycles, the idea of seven millennial cycles, originally a Zoroastrian concept, was long popular among the Ismāʿīlīs and other heterodox Shīʿī circles. Moreover, to convince Akbar, as Badā'ūnī puts it, among other "Shīʿī superstitions" the Nuqṭawīs relied on a chiliastic quadrant attributed to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the Ismāʿīlī poet, philosopher and propagandist:

> In the year nine hundred and ninety by the ordinance of the fate,
> Gather all the stars in one place.
> In the year Leo, month Leo, day Leo,
> Walks out from behind the curtain God's lion.

Badā'ūnī considers this prediction as the beginning of Akbar's claim to prophecy. As he puts it "not *nubuwwa* in so many words but in other terms (i.e. in deeds)," for he was perceived by Nuqṭawīs as the "Lord of the Age" (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) and God's lion (*Asad Allāh*)." The Nuqṭawīs insisted that by doing so Akbar removed the communal barrier between the seventy-two nations (*haftād u dū millat*) of Muslim and Hindu persuasions.[30]

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[28] See Amanat, Nuqṭawī Movement 291–92.

[29] Cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 33. Another version of Āmulī's millennial prophecy appears in Shāhnawāz Khān, *Maʾathir* ii, cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 48.

[30] Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 286–88.

What is more remarkable is a strong Persian proto-nationalist awareness that came with the implementation of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* at the turn of the millennium. A clear set of counter Islamic measures after 1580 include exile of Sunnī clergy from the court on the charge of opposing *Dīn-i Ilāhī* (which may have also caused Sirhindī's departure or perhaps expulsion from Mughal court in Agra), relaxing prohibition on wine selling and wine drinking, regulated legalization of prostitution, lifting Islamic ban on eating pork, rehabilitation of dogs as ritually clean, permissibility of the use of silk and gold banned in the *sharīʿa*, and lifting prohibition on inter-faith marriage especially among Muslims and Hindus.

Even more striking measures were putting an end to the state's enforcement of the Islamic obligatory daily prayers, congregational prayers, fasting and pilgrimage; a prescribed duty of any Muslim ruler. A year later in 1583 study of Arabic and Islamic scholastic curriculum was discouraged throughout the Mughal domain. Even Arabic letters that rendered unpronounceable in Persian were omitted from the Persian alphabet, a measure that brought drastic reform into transcribing words of Arabic origin in Persian. Still more, if we believe the hostile report of Badāʾūnī, names and titles of the Prophet of Islam were banned, churches were allowed to be constructed and finally in 1593 a decree granted complete freedom to all religions in the Mughal Empire.

The remarkable departures from prevailing Islamic beliefs and practices coincided with official inauguration of the Ilāhī era in 991/1584 coinciding with initiation of a group of nineteen early converts to the new creed. Among the Hindus and Muslim primal initiates was Mīr Sharīf Āmulī, Shaykh Mubārak, his sons ʿAllāmī and Fayḍī and Akbar's own son Salīm (later Jahāngīr). It is difficult to downplay, as some observers did, the impact of these revolutionary measurers and their symbolic effect on a society long accustomed to superiority of the Islamic creed. Given the emphasis of Nuqṭawī teachings on a proto-nationalist Persian identity, it is also hard to believe that such radical ideas were not at least partially inspired by the Nuqṭawīs and likeminded heretics. That the followers of the neo-Zoroastrian Adhar Kaywān—who himself fled to India fearing Safavid persecution circa 1570– shared similar pro-Persian sentiments, further confirms a strong urge among Iranian exiles for constructing a new Persian identity distinct in its time reckoning and transcript and free from Arabic influences as much as distant from Islamic teachings.[31]

[31] For a list of *Ilāhī* measures see Roychoudhury, *Din-i Ilahi* 177–97, which is largely based on Badāʾūnī's *Muntakhab*, esp. ii, 209–24, and on *Dabistān*, Chap. 10.

Acclimation of the Nuqṭawīs in India

We know that not only Āmulī remained an advisor to the emperor, but in 993/1585 he was promoted to the offices of *amīn* and *ṣadr* in Kabul, a coveted provincial post of some significance. Later in 1000/1591–92 he was promoted to *amīn* and *ṣadr* of Bihar, a center for Adhar Kaywānīs, and to Bengal. Later he was promoted to other high offices in various provinces of the empire with elevated administrative rank.[32] Though Akbar treated him kindly, it is not unlikely that shortly after declaring *Dīn-i Ilāhī* Āmulī was sent off to provinces, a dignified exile perhaps, to fend off controversies arising from enforcement of new measures. He received assuring letters from Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī, along with advice as how to allocate pensions to a network of Nuqṭawī dervishes, what Gīlānī euphemistically refers to as Aḥādiyān. Yet there was a hint of containing the spread of Nuqṭawism. It is as if the comfortable posts with lucrative income were meant to turn the former dervish into an affluent officeholder with an income from his assigned land tenure and other sources.

More than a decade later Āmulī still was in office serving under Jahāngīr (r. 1605–27), Akbar's son and successor who revoked many of his father's measures but in spirit remained faithful to aspects of *Dīn-i Ilāhī*. In 1014/1606 Jahāngīr offered Āmulī a monetary award and a new post and described him in his memoirs as a "pure-hearted, lively-spirited man."

> Though he has no tincture of current sciences [presumably meaning no formal religious education], lofty words and exalted knowledge often manifest themselves in him. In the dress of a faqir he made many journeys, and he has friendship with many saints and recites the maxims of those who profess mysticism. This is his conversation and not his practice (*qālī ast na ḥālī*). In the time of my revered father he relinquished the garment of poverty and asceticism, and attained to amirship and chieftainship. His utterances are exceedingly powerful, and his conversation is remarkably eloquent and pure, although he is without Arabic. His (verse) compositions are not devoid of verve.[33]

On the surface Āmulī's shift of career may seem something of an anticlimax for a millenarian heretic. We may understand Jahāngīr's reference in the enigmatic passage above, as an indication that Āmulī no longer is a practitioner (*ḥālī*) of his earlier beliefs; namely advocacy of Nuqṭawism.

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[32] Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'athir* iii, 285–60, cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 45–48.
[33] Jahāngīr, *Tuzuk* 47–48.

Yet still his utterances are effective and powerful and free of Arabic, another indication of his proto-Persian convictions.

We also know that even under Jahāngīr he leveraged his high office to build up a dervish constituency. Later that year when we hear of him for the last time, he is receiving a gift of 9,000 rupees "to be given in alms to faqirs and other poor people."[34] It is tempting to think that Āmulī and likeminded freethinkers of his day helped perpetuating the spread of agnostic Nuqṭawī ideas through itinerant dervishes possibly as far as the Safavid realms.

Amnesia or Suppression?

It is important to note that despite the presence of Āmulī and a number of Nuqṭawīs in Akbar's court and while enjoying moral support of ʿAllāmī and Fayḍī, the Nuqṭawī contribution to Akbar's religious synthesis was often ignored if not purposefully suppressed by the later historians. This is first evident in the case of Badāʾūnī's history, *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*, which was written covertly while he was in Akbar's service. A decade after Akbar's death when in 1024/1615 it was first became known to the public it was immediately banned by Jahāngīr because of openly acknowledging Akbar's heretical beliefs and his affinity with the Nuqṭawīs. Muḥammad Hāshim Khāfī Khān, the author of the late 18th century *Muntakhab al-lubāb*, who acknowledges suppression of Badāʾūnī's history under Jahāngīr states:

> ʿAbd al-Qādir the author of *Tārīkh-i Badāʾūnī* for a while was among inner attendants of the Imām (i.e. Akbar), may he reside in the sublime heavens. He was an established scholar who apparently was at odds on religious issues with other scholars of that era including Shaykh Fayḍī and Shaykh Abū-l-Faḍl (ʿAllāmī), sons of Shaykh Mubārak. Therefore he spelled out some statements (in his history) that were contrary to Islamic dogmas about both brothers and about a group of their protégés who were favored by the king and allowed to speak out (in his presence). He also alleged in a few instances a number of unmentionable claims foreign to sound reason about the late His Majesty.

Khāfī Khān further elaborates that since Badāʾūnī in a few places had written things about Akbar that "to wise people clearly reeked bias and selfish intentions," after his death Jahāngīr not only ordered the arrest of his son

[34] *Ibid.* 81.

and plunder of his house, but took written pledges from booksellers not to buy or sell Badā'ūnī's history. Fearing Jahāngīr's rage, Khāfī Khān points out that at least three historians of that era completely stayed clear in their works from the issue of Akbar's beliefs.[35]

Even traces of Nuqṭawī influence seems to have been modified, if not entirely edited out, from later renditions of ʿAllāmī's well-known *Akbarnāma* and his *A'īn-i Akbarī*. As Kiyā points out, Muḥammad Hāshim Khāfī Khān is the only biographer who acknowledges such omission in chronicles of Jahāngīr's reign. In a marginal passage to his *Muntakhab al-lubāb* he states, "since the author of these pages does not speak but of the truth and does not bother to have the approval of the chiefs and the ministers, after much research and examination he gleaned from Badā'ūnī's history and other sources whatever had been said [about Akbar] and described the truth of the matter on the principle that citing disbelief is not disbelief."[36]

Omissions may also have been made in later renditions of *Tārīkh-i Alfī*. The last historian of this multi-authored history, Jaʿfar Bayg Qazwīnī, better known as Aṣaf Khān (d. 1612), was commissioned to cover events up to the year 997/1589 (or possibly even up to 1010/1601, the millennium of Muḥammad's death) but most extant copies of this history, which witnessed numerous revisions at the time of Akbar and later, only covers up to the year 984/1576. That is the same year that Akbar initiated *Dīn-i Ilāhī* and the new *Ilāhī* calendar. Moreover, both the prologue (*muqaddima*) and the epilogue (*mu'akhkhara*) to this history which are penned by Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī, is missing from all extant copies. The omission prompt us to conclude that the final part of the original version of this history—covering the emergence of *Dīn-i Ilāhī* and the corresponding events—was deemed heretical and unfit to Akbar's later image and thus it was expunged from the text.[37]

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[35] Khāfī Khān, *Muntakhab* i, 197–98, cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 33–34 n. 4.

[36] Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān* 33–34 n. 4 citing from a marginal note in a manuscript copy of Khāfī Khān's *Muntakhab* 197–198.

[37] Storey, *Persian Literature* i, 118–22 and Āl-i Dāwūd, Introduction to *Tārīkh-i Alfī* 15–17, 39–49. It is important to note that in the year 1000/1591–92 Akbar reportedly commissioned Badā'ūnī to revise the widely-disputed history in order to assure factual and chronological accuracy. In his *Muntakhab* ii, 221–22, Badā'ūnī states that he only revised the first two parts but left the final part to Aṣaf Khān Qazwīnī. We may thus surmise that Aṣaf should be held responsible for revisions of the third part, and hence the enigma of the missing final years. Given Badā'ūnī's well-known hostility toward all non-orthodox trends in Akbar's court, his report should be treated with caution. Before examining all the extant manuscript copies and careful reconstruction of the timeline of various revisions, it

The "success story" of Sharīf Āmulī stands in stark contrast to the fate of Nuqṭawī leaders and Nuqṭawī "intellectuals" in Safavid Iran. The tolerant court of Mughal emperor and the spirit that it generated in the multi-confessional society of early Mughal era, offered a public sphere for debate and dissention which in turn contributed to a new synthesis. By contrast in Safavid Iran Nuqṭawīs were forced to go underground and leave barely any tangible mark on the Safavid cultural landscape, at least directly. The terrible fate of Nuqṭawī thinkers and activists such as Abū-l-Qāsim Amrī from Quhpāyih (in the vicinity of Iṣfahān) is just one example. Amrī, a poet of some innovation who among other works produced a dialogue in verse entitled *dhikr wa fikr* (remembrance and thinking), was blinded by the order of Tahmāsp in 973/1565, perhaps becoming the first victim of anti-Nuqṭawī harassment in Safavid Iran. A quarter of a century later in 999/1590–91 he was again arrested for advocacy of Nuqṭawī beliefs and this time was lynched by the Shīrāz mob at the outset of the second anti-Nuqṭawī campaign under ʿAbbās I. His chronogram composed by a hostile source was "enemy of God" (*dushman-i khudā* = 999). He and his followers in the Nuqṭawī circle in Shīrāz were accused of collaborating with the rebellious minister of Fārs, Mīrzā Jān Bayg, in organizing a massive anti-Safavid revolt in the Fārs province which, given the date, must have carried a millennial undertone. Predictably the *ʿulamāʾ* and *sādāt* (those who claimed to be descendants of the Shīʿī Imāms) in Shīrāz played a pivotal part in inciting the public to mutilate Amrī's body. Even the victim's denouncing Nuqṭawī affiliation did not help the blind poet of Shīrāz.[38]

Another Nuqṭawī leader, Mīr Sayyid Aḥmad Kāshī (Kāshānī) met his terrible end when he was cut into two halves by the sword of ʿAbbās I during the *mulḥid-kushī* of 1002/1593–94. We were told that not only he believed that the world was "eternal" (*qadīm*) but he stood accused of denying the Final Day and resurrection of the bodies. Instead, he considered "the reward for the good and punishment for the evil not in otherworldly Heaven and the Hell but in the happiness or misery (*ʿāfiyat wa [yā] madhallat*) of this world." His gravest sin, as noted by Iskandar Bayg Munshī, the author of *Tārīkh-i ʿalamārā-yi ʿAbbāsī*, was that he was

is difficult to determine under which circumstances and at what point of time omissions had occurred.

[38] An account of Amrī's life and death appears in Awḥadī, *ʿArafāt*. Amrī's account was first cited in Kiyā, *Nuqṭawiyān*, 59–61 from a manuscript copy in Malik Library, Tehran. Awḥadī, himself a poet, had interviewed Amrī in his old age and carried poetic exchanges with him.

accused of receiving a decree (*manshūr*) from Akbar's chief minister, Abū-l-Faḍl ʿAllāmī. This was held against him as proof of his treason.[39]

Yet despite different treatment in Mughal India and Safavid Iran, over time Nuqṭawism and similar nonconformist and agnostic trends left little lasting impact on the mainstream culture of the two empires. We surely may attribute this to the esoteric nature of Nuqṭawī thought and its complex cabalistic system inaccessible to the ordinary people. Yet there was enough intellectual vigor in the movement and enough speculative competence among its activists to synthesize and streamline the core ideas of Pasīkhānī's cyclical renewal and his anthropocentric call for divorcing the heavens and returning the Adamic essence to earth.[40]

The *ṣulḥ-i kull* was confined to its rudiments, and by implication its desire to enforce state's supremacy over a plural religious environment, was never fully realized. Yet in essence it remained a powerful initiative that lingered for another century in Mughal environment. If an ideal climate for a new religio-cultural synthesis was conceivable anywhere in the early modern Muslim empires, it was in Akbar's India. Yet the eclipse of Nuqṭawism, and its desire to supersede the Islamic cycle, as prophesized at the time, may well be attributed to the passing of the millennial momentum after the year 1000 (or perhaps as late as 1010). The decade long period before the Islamic millennium was long enough to allow a new religious fermentation in which the Nuqṭawīs participated but not long enough to encourage a lasting synthesis.

Legacy of the Nuqṭawīs

Nuqṭawism lingered as an identifiable heresy perhaps up to 1700, mostly clandestinely, within some dervish circles. Nuqṭawī texts also seem to have circulated in India and in Iran and may have influenced the 19th century Bābī thinking on similar themes of cyclical renewal and anthropocentric "pointism." Interestingly, the original adherents to *Dīn-i Ilāhī* consisted of nineteen initiates, which is identical with the nineteen Bābī *Ḥurūf-i Ḥayy* (letters of living).[41] Parallels between Nuqṭawī beliefs and symbolism and the Bābī though are indeed striking. Preoccupation of Sayyid ʿAlī

[39] Munshī, *Tārīkh* i, 476–77.

[40] See Amanat, Nuqtawi Movement 284–79, reprinted in idem, *Apocalyptic Islam* 77–82.

[41] Ahmad, Dīn-i Ilāhī.

Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, the founder of the movement, with numerology and occult sciences (*ʿulūm-i gharība*) and his self assumed status as the Primal Point (*nuqṭa-yi ūlā*) of the new prophetic dispensation at the least hints at a textual continuity between the Nuqṭawīs and the Bābīs.[42]

The idea of *ṣulḥ-i kull* also ceased to exist as a state ideology during Jahāngīr's year and its unorthodox roots were downplayed. It may have survived in essence at least up to the 18th century within such circles as Dārā Shikūh and the Indo-Ṣūfī mystical thought articulated there. As a general concept, implying religious toleration and acceptance of all religions, it also survived in the Iranian milieu and may have influenced the Bahāʾī idea of universality of divine revelation. Mīrzā Fatḥ ʿAlī Akhūndzādih's famous play, *Yūsuf-i tarkash-dūz*, moreover, was a nostalgic dramatization of the brutal treatment of the Nuqṭawīs under ʿAbbās I. Nearly a century later, in the 1960's Jalal Al-Ahmad's novella, *Nūn wa-l-qalam*, which was an allusion to the events of his own time, was also inspired by the Nuqṭawī memory, even though his portrayal is colored by a predictable idealization of Shīʿī martyrdom narrative.

As often been noted the age of Aurangzeb witnessed near complete reversal of earlier Mughal religious policy in favor of strict *sharīʿa*-orientated interpretation of Islam evidently as a reaction to ecumenical tendencies of Akbar's court. The "neo-Ṣūfīs," followers of Sirhindī—as Faḍl al-Raḥman identifies them—were deeply suspicious, and vocal in their criticism of *waḥdat-i wujūd* Ṣūfism let alone heretical millenal exhortations of heretics such as the Nuqṭawīs. Greater reassertion of orthodox Islam by Sunnī theologians and jurists only compounded the pressure on freethinkers not only in the Indian subcontinent but in other Muslim societies of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Later traces of Nuqṭawīs and Nuqṭawī symbolism is nevertheless noticed by a few authors. Among them is the early 19th century Niʿmatullāhī Ṣūfī leader Muḥammad Jaʿfar Kabūdarāhangī better known by his Ṣūfī title Majdhūb-ʿAlī Shāh. A *sharīʿa*-orientated Ṣūfī, Majdhūb in a number of treatises attacked Nuqṭawīs as heretics and materialists as if they were his contemporaries.[43] The dervish Ṣūfī order known as *Khāksār* (earthly) with

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[42] See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 13–14, 134–35, for resemblances with Nuqṭawī themes.

[43] See for instance Majdhūb's reference to the Nuqṭawīs in his treatise *Iʿtiqādāt* (dogmas; also known as *al-ʿaqāʾid al-Majdhūbiya*) accusing them of being atheists and believers in reincarnation (Majdhūb, *Rasāʾil* 3–26 (11, 21). See also Dhakāwatī-Qaraguzlū, Nuqṭawiya 157, which cites Majdhūb's *Mirʾat* 91, confirming the author's encounter with heretical Ṣūfīs, a veiled reference to the Nuqṭawīs. Aqā Muḥammad-ʿAlī Bihbahānī, the

a Perso-Indian network active up to the 20th century also is considered as a relic of the earlier Nuqṭawīs.[44]

Beyond manifest and latent traces, a crucial point differentiated Nuqṭawīsm and other agnostic trend of the early modern Persianate world from their equivalents in Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries. Whereas in Mughal India under Akbar and his immediate predecessors a climate for toleration allowed concentration of freethinkers such as the Nuqṭawīs for at least seven decades, this important window did not result in the rise of a lasting philosophical movement similar to the early Enlightenment in such places as the Dutch Republic. Whereas Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz among others, laid the ground for what is often defined as Radical Enlightenment, in Mughal India similar tendencies represented by likes of Sharīf Āmulī, Abū-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī, and ʿUrfī Shīrāzī took a very different course. The former group, advantaged by the print revolution of the early modern times, managed to establish roots and gain readerships in the public sphere beyond such safe havens as Amsterdam, Leiden and Hague and despite strong opposition from the church and from most of Europe's rulers. Even by the late 16th century burning of heretics at the stake was not uncommon in Europe.

In Iran by the late 16th century the prevalence of *sharīʿa* scholasticism not only seriously hindered even the benign speculative philosophy of the School of Iṣfahān—what Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī named the "wisdom of divine." It has been suggested that the growth of speculative thought in 16th and early 17th century Safavid Iran may have been inspired by discourses of Ādhar Kaywānīs and Nuqṭawīs. That ʿAbbās I before persecuting Nuqṭawīs showed interest in their ideas, as evident from his attendance of the Nuqṭawī convents in Qazwīn and Iṣfahān, may have encouraged him to patronize philosophical pursuits. It is quite likely that such encounters had a deep impact on the otherwise erratic and merciless ruler. Yet even if the philosophers of the school of Iṣfahān were inspired by heterodox

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powerful Uṣūlī mujtahid of Kirmānshāh and son of Aqā Muḥammad-Bāqir Bihbahānī, was an acknowledged anti-Ṣūfī inquisitor of the early Qajar era. He acquired the title of *Ṣūfī-kush* (Ṣūfī killer) because of his anti-Ṣūfī *fatwas* that led to execution of a number of Ṣūfīs. In his polemical work *Khayratiya*, which primarily refutes Niʿmatullāhī Ṣūfīs, he condemns "dissenters," "deviators" and "heretics," who followed Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī. It is likely that Bihbahānī's earlier residence in India made him conscious of the Nuqṭawī heretics (Bihbahānī, *Khayratiya* ii, 16–62 and 176–94). The latter is a summery citation of *Thuqūb al-shihāb fi rajm al-murtāb* by a unanimous author.

[44] Connection with the Khāksār, suggested among others by Mudarrisī Chahārdihī, *Khāksār* 8, deserves further investigation. See also Dhakāwātī-Qaraguzlū, Nuqṭawiya 154.

speculations, they did not look at such a legacy very kindly. Nuqṭawīsm, whether in Iran or in India, faced a monumental challenge. By questioning the finality of Islam as a divine dispensation and by attempting to emancipate mankind from the yoke of a repressive theology, it barely had the means or the philosophical preparation to deliver its message.

Even in Mughal India such trends despite their speculative groundings never managed to break away from the court patronage. And when it did, it took refuge in the dervish convents, Ṣūfī circles and poetic gatherings. Despite a strong Ṣūfī tradition conducive to doctrinal break from the *sharīʿa*, agnostic thought never seriously opted for a rational methodology (if not actively opposing it for being detrimental to mystical truth). Although resistance to reason was mostly to the scholastic logic and theology of medieval Islam, in the process counter-rationalism even rejected dabbling in speculative philosophy of earlier centuries. In such climate it is not surprising to witness rapid decline of antinomian thought once Mughal patronage ceased to exist.

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MESSIANISM, HERESY, AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE IN MUGHAL INDIA

A. Azfar Moin

> And since, in his Majesty's opinion, it was a settled fact, that the 1000 years since the time of the mission of Prophet (peace be upon him!), which was to be the period of the continuance of the faith of Islam, were now completed, no hindrance remained to the promulgation of those secret designs, which he nursed in his heart. . . . He felt at liberty to embark fearlessly on his design of annulling the statutes and ordinances of Islam, and of establishing his own cherished pernicious belief [in their stead].
>
> ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī

In 990/1582, the Mughal emperor Jalāl al-Dīn Akbar (d. 1012/1605) stood accused of abjuring Islam and claiming to be the harbinger of a new sacred order.[1] The first millennium of Islam was coming to a close and astrological signs held omens for religio-political change.[2] Akbar had ordered a new history to be written, calling it the *Tārīkh-i alfī* (Millennial History) and issued new coins with the "era of the thousands" stamped on them. In the years that followed, Abū-l-Faḍl, a learned courtier, historian, and confidant of the emperor, crafted a new imperial narrative, the *Akbarnāma* (Book of Akbar), which exalted the sovereign in spiritual terms.[3] Using elaborate metaphors of light borrowed from Ṣūfī metaphysics,

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[1] Badāʾūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 301; Badāʾūnī et al., *Muntakhab* ii, 310.

[2] The theory that major religio-political changes, including the appearance of the savior or messiah before the end of the world, take place at the end of a millennial cycle were deeply grounded in the science of conjunction astrology. A mixture of ancient Iranian, Indian, and Greek traditions, conjunction astrology became popular from the ninth century onward in the Muslim world through the works of the renowned astrologer Abū Maʿshar (d. 272/886, known as Albumazar in Christiandom). This is how David Pingree describes the basics of this science: "A Saturn-Jupiter conjunction takes place about every 20 years; a series will occur in the signs of one triplicity for about 240 years, that is twelve conjunctions; and they will have passed through the four triplicities and begin the cycle again after about 960 years. When they shift from one triplicity to another, they indicate events on the order of dynastic changes. The completion of a cycle of 960 years, which is mixed up with various millennial theories, causes revolutionary events such as the appearance of a major prophet. The ordinary course of politics is dependent on the horoscopes of the vernal equinoxes of the years in which the minor conjunctions within a triplicity take place." See Pingree, Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran 245.

[3] Richards, The Formulation of Imperial Authority.

he connected the genealogy of the emperor's world-conquering Turko-Mongol ancestors to the biblical prophets. He portrayed Akbar as the Perfect Individual (*insān-i kāmil*), the saint of the age, and a reason for the cosmos to exist. It was a grand claim even for a monarch who had not too long before attempted to centralize all temporal religious authority in his person.[4]

The religious opposition to Akbar's claims among his courtiers is epitomized by ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī (d. c. 1023/1614–5). A rival of Abū-l-Faḍl, Badāʾūnī was also an accomplished scholar and historian. He personally witnessed and participated in much of what went on at Akbar's court, especially the religious debates held in the famous House of Worship (*ʿibādat khāna*). He was also responsible for composing part of the *Tārīkh-i Alfī*. Despite his long career as a Mughal courtier and scholar, Badāʾūnī harbored a great deal of antagonism toward Akbar. He kept his feelings hidden in order to lead a successful life at court but, in secrecy, composed his own version of events in a work entitled *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* (Selected Histories), which portrayed Akbar's millennial claims and religious pursuits in an extremely negative light. Indeed, Badāʾūnī's views about the emperor are almost diametrically opposed to those found in the hagiographical *Akbarnāma* of Abū-l-Faḍl. It is for this reason that Badāʾūnī's secret chronicle is considered today to be a foremost source of history, second only to the *Akbarnāma,* for understanding the affairs of Akbar's court.

This essay is meant to complicate Badāʾūnī's image of being an "orthodox" Sunnī critic of the emperor, and to provide a new way of understanding his writings. Badāʾūnī was more than just a chronicler. He was also a heresiographer and hagiographer. To understand his historical writing we must contextualize it within genres and styles of writing used on the one hand to portray the lives of saints and holy men and, on the other, to depict the deviance and waywardness of heretics. As the argument below will make evident, Badāʾūnī did not just condemn the alleged deviancy of Akbar at the turn of the Islamic millennium. He also depicted the Mughal emperor as the latest in a long line of heresiarchs. In addition, and somewhat paradoxically, Badāʾūnī apologized for and justified the transgressive messianic claims of two Ṣūfī saints to whose memory he was personally devoted. These were Sayyid Muḥammad of Jawnpur (d. 847/1505) and Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 868/1464), about whom he wrote in a deeply hagiographic vein. To resolve this paradox, and to examine how

[4] Nizami, *Akbar & Religion* 127–29.

Badāʾūnī's heresiography and hagiography related to his history writing, we must begin with a brief review of the millennial controversy at Akbar's court.[5]

Akbar as the "Perfect Individual"

Among the Muslim rulers of northern India, Akbar is famous for both his usurpation of religious authority and his religious eclecticism. In 986/1579, he promulgated an edict or *maḥḍar*, often called the "infallibility decree." Framed by Muslim scholars loyal to him, this edict set up Akbar as the supreme arbiter in religious matters, empowered to resolve doctrinal disagreements among scholars of Islamic jurisprudence. This was also the time when he arranged discussions and debates among representatives of different sacred traditions—Zoroastrianism, Brahmanism, Jainism, and Christianity as well as the various interpretations of Islam prevalent in the region. These actions are thought to have culminated in a "syncretistic religion," Akbar's so-called *Dīn-i Ilāhī* (Divine Religion), a controversial episode in Mughal history that has been extensively debated in scholarly literature.[6] Depending on the perspective taken, the Mughal ruler has been seen as a heretic from Islam on the one extreme and as a model of Muslim religious tolerance on the other. However, the broad scholarly consensus is that Akbar's spiritual eclecticism reflected his political shrewdness; by creating an aura of pluralism around him, he reinforced the loyalty of the multicultural aristocratic class, and in doing so he strengthened his own political position.

It must be noted, however, that Akbar's religious experiments were never given an official name—the expression "*Dīn-i Ilāhī*" appeared first in Badāʾūnī's writings and later became a way to describe the devotional order centered on the person of the Mughal sovereign. In institutional terms, this was an imperial circle of discipleship (*murīdī*) in which Mughal courtiers and officers were invited and encouraged to participate, the honor not limited to Muslims but open to members of all religious communities. Moreover, membership was ostensibly voluntary.

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[5] For a detailed discussion see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

[6] This topic is covered well in Nizami, *Akbar & Religion*, and Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*. For a new perspective, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

Those who joined and became devotees (*murīd*) of the emperor had to swear an oath of loyalty to the emperor as their spiritual master (*pīr*).[7] Part of the initiation ceremony required the imperial disciples to rise above traditional or "imitative" (*taqlīdī*) religion in their service to the emperor. The sign of membership was the emperor's special insignia in the form of a signet ring (*shast*) and a miniature portrait (*shabīh*) that could be placed upon or inside one's turban or headgear. Akbar's successor, Jahāngīr, also continued this mode of honoring courtiers and developing loyalty among senior officials. According to Sir Thomas Roe, the first English ambassador to the Mughal Court, Jahāngīr invited him to go through such an initiation ceremony and honored him with the signet and portrait; however, the emperor was considerate enough to waive for the English diplomat the bothersome requirement of prostration before the monarch.[8]

The Mughal use of a messianic and saintly idiom to organize their court was not as novel as it may appear at first glance. In fact, the contemporary rulers of Iran, the Safavids, had already instituted this practice at the beginning of the sixteenth century and, indeed, may have been crucial in providing the millennial model and messianic inspiration for the Mughals of India. But the Mughal use of a messianic idiom developed in an almost opposite way to that of their Iranian neighbors.

As is well established in scholarship, the Safavids were openly messianic in their early attempt to unite fractious Turkic warrior tribes under a charismatic millenarian political paradigm.[9] Their followers and soldiers were called Qizilbāsh (Red Heads), named after their red headgear inflected with Alid symbolism.[10] Later, with their dynastic power consolidated, the Safavids sought to stabilize their rule by switching over to a more routinized and expansive mode of sovereignty: transitioning, to put it schematically, from the image of a messiah (Shāh Ismāʿīl I, d. 930/1524) to that of a mystic (Shāh Tahmasb, d. 984/1576) and finally to that of a "Shīʿī" monarch (Shāh ʿAbbās I, d. 984/1629).

By contrast, the lack of opportunity in Safavid Iran and Uzbek Central Asia along with the promise of India's wealth motivated Akbar's grandfather Bābur (d. 937/1530) to capture the throne of Delhi. His successor,

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[7] A good discussion on this can be found in Richards, The Formulation of Imperial Authority.

[8] Roe and Foster, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe* 244–45. This incident is also related in Richards, The Formulation of Imperial Authority 309.

[9] Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*.

[10] See Shahzad Bashir's essay in this volume.

Humāyūn (d. 963/1556), had barely consolidated the nascent Mughal realm in India before he was forced out by the Sur Afghans and spent fifteen years outside the region, mostly on the run and in exile, before being able to regain power in Kabul and, from there, to recapture Delhi. When his son Akbar ascended the throne, the Mughal power base consisted of a mix of Turkish and Iranian Muslim noblemen of various ethnic and sectarian identities, to which the young emperor added a number of Rajput allies. This was a sharp contrast to the Turkic Qizilbāsh warlords upon whose military might the Safavids had initially depended. Akbar's political problem was not counterbalancing and taming a fervid tribal military but rather creating a mechanism for maintaining the loyalties of his culturally diverse base of aristocrats and soldiers.

In administrative terms Akbar accomplished his goal by launching the famed *manṣabdārī* system in which each royal officer was assigned a two-dimensional rank—*dhāt* (personal) rank and *sawār* (military) rank.[11] According to their rank, noblemen and officers were given a life-time grant of agricultural land, often in an area away from their homeland, from which they supported themselves and their military commitment to the emperor. All members of Akbar's court, from his own sons to newly conquered "allies," were placed in this ranking system and awarded revenue from land grants accordingly. In symbolic terms, moreover, Akbar's solution was to create a mystical aura around the person of the emperor in order to bind his courtiers and senior officers to him in a patron-client relationship similar to that found in Ṣūfī orders. In other words, he supplemented his monarchic glory with a mystical image expressed in symbols that resonated with the dominant mystical trends prevalent at the time.

As mentioned before, the official history of Akbar's reign, the *Akbarnāma*, written in the final decade of the sixteenth century, presented the Mughal emperor as the ideal world ruler. The chronicler Abū-l-Faḍl constructed this image using elements of Persianate and Greek political theory combined with Ṣūfī metaphysics. In his extensive study, S.A.A. Rizvi concluded that Abū-l-Faḍl defined Akbar as the Perfect Man or Perfect Individual (*insān-i kāmil*).[12] This richly symbolic expression was shared among Islamic discourses of Ṣūfism, rationalist philosophy and theories of kingship. In all three literary traditions, the Perfect Individual signified the human ideal type necessary for the cosmos to maintain its order: for the Ṣūfīs such an

[11] Richards, *The Mughal Empire* 63–66.
[12] Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History* 352–57.

ideal was the mystical *quṭb* (pole) of the age, for the Muslim philosophers following the Greek tradition it signified the philosopher-king, and for the political theorists it was the monarch blessed with the *farr-i īzadī* (divine effulgence).

The expression *insān-i kāmil*, moreover, had a deeper meaning built on "Hermetical" alchemical conceptions that resonated well with the esoteric doctrines of a number of messianic and millennial groups of Ṣūfīs. These groups were often termed "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*) because of beliefs radically different from established doctrine and considered extreme by the mainstream traditions of Islam.[13] The Qizilbāsh devotees of the Safavids, for instance, were also labeled by their enemies as *ghulāt* because they believed in transmigration of the soul (*tanāsukh*) and considered their leader Shāh Ismāʿīl to be the *mahdī* and the godhead.

In broad terms, however, the theories mentioned above held in common that for the cosmos to exist in harmony, a Perfect Individual must exist who "unites the totality of both of the divine (*ilāhiyya*) worlds and of the engendered (*kawniyya*) words, universal and particular."[14] But if the Prophet Muḥammad was the Perfect Individual—unique in all eternity—then how could another human being take his place? The answer to this conundrum, provided by Ṣūfī metaphysicians like Ibn al-ʿArabī and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, was elaborated in the concept of the Muḥammadan Reality: the perfect men of each age even though they appear in different guises in various epochs, are spiritually united with Muḥammad, the original and unique Perfect Individual. According to this metaphysical view, all perfect individuals appear spiritually identical when perceived with the inner eye even though they appear to be different to the external senses. However, respectable scholars propounding this concept were at pains to emphasize that the process by which this reality manifests itself again and again in different men throughout the ages must not be confused with the radically extremist or "exaggerated" (*ghulāt*) idea of metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul.[15] Rather they argued that the mechanism

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[13] The literature on this concept in Ṣūfī metaphysics is quite broad. A succinct summary and review can be found in Arnaldez, al-Insān al-Kāmil. For the literature on *ghulāt*, see Hodgson, Ghulat.

[14] Arnaldez, Al-Insān al-Kāmil.

[15] Arnaldez summarizes this argument as follows: "There is no metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) here, but merely the irradiation (*tajallī*) of the Muḥammadan Reality in each era upon the most perfect of men, who thus become the representatives (*khulafā'*) of the Prophet on the plane of manifestation (*ẓāhir*), while the Muḥammadan Reality is the hidden side (*bāṭin*) of their own reality." *ibid.*

for the manifestation of the Perfect Individual was akin to a neo-platonic manifestation or irradiation (*tajallī*). The result, nonetheless, was a sanitized and broadly accepted theory that was only thinly differentiated from the belief in the cyclically reincarnated messiah of the "heretical" *ghulāt* traditions.

In sum, the condensed and polyvalent symbolism of the Perfect Individual allowed Abū-l-Faḍl to use this expression to portray Akbar in a way that different Ṣūfīs, philosophers, and *ghulāt* groups could receive and interpret his sovereign status according to their own cosmological views. Indeed, we can see this happening when, at the turn of the Islamic millennium, the Iranian Nuqṭawīs found refuge at the Mughal court from persecution in Safavid Iran. Famous for holding *ghulāt* messianic views, the Nuqṭawīs used their esoteric conceptions of time and cosmos to proclaim Akbar the *mahdī* and the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib-i zamān*).[16] The emperor did not discourage such attention, however. The official position taken on this issue in the *Akbarnāma* is revealing. It stated that Akbar did not agree with such groups, but tolerated them and their beliefs according to his policy of "universal peace" (*ṣulḥ-i kull*), under which he accommodated all variations and differences in religious opinion.[17]

Badā'ūnī's Messianic Beliefs

In his secretly written chronicle, Badā'ūnī was as critical of the emperor as he was of the radical Ṣūfī groups like the newly arrived Nuqṭawīs, whom he described as the worst of the heretics. However, this image of Badā'ūnī as a traditional Sunnī who was shocked at the messianic claims of deviant Ṣūfīs is not altogether an accurate one. This becomes clear upon an examination of his other extant work, *Najāt al-Rashīd* (A Guide for Deliverance) which has not received as much scholarly attention as his chronicle.[18] Often described as a Ṣūfī ethical text, the *Najāt al-Rashīd* was written publicly (as opposed to Badā'ūnī's clandestinely composed history) and completed

[16] Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 287; Badā'ūnī et al., *Muntakhab* ii, 295. Also, see Abbas Amanat's essay on the Nuqṭawīs in this volume.

[17] *Ṣulḥ-i kull*, a unique expression used in the *Akbarnāma* to indicate an accommodative attitude toward all religious traditions, is commonly translated idiomatically as "peace with all" but a literal and more appropriate translation would be "total peace" or "universal peace" where *kull* means total or universal as opposed to *juzw* meaning component or particular. Rizvi, Dimensions of *Sulh-i Kul*.

[18] Badā'ūnī, *Najāt al-Rashīd*.

in the year 999/1591–2, only a decade after the controversial millennial celebrations at court. In it, Badā'ūnī did not mention the Mughal emperor or anyone else at court by name. However, he provided a long exposition of the spiritual mechanism by which a person with strong saintly potential is transformed into the expected savior or messiah.[19] Badā'ūnī did so, moreover, in the context of an elaborate defense of the messianic claims of the Indian leader of the Mahdawīs, Sayyid Muḥammad of Jawnpur and the Central Asian Ṣūfī Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh.

Mahdawī tradition relates that as a Ṣūfī warrior, active in the northern Indian state of Jawnpur, Sayyid Muḥammad underwent an intense mystical experience in the middle of battle. He went into a trance, withdrew from the world and began a long spiritual quest. Eventually, he declared himself the awaited *mahdī* while on a pilgrimage to Mecca.[20] He asserted that it was incumbent upon all Muslims to believe in his messianic status or risk becoming infidels. A small but devoted band of followers gathered around him, living an ascetic life and practicing communal sharing of property. Jawnpuri and his followers moved across Gujarat, Sind and finally to Afghanistan where he died. His successors were persecuted by the Afghan Sur dynasty in India but still kept the movement alive. Over time, the group gave up its militant and political stance and became more secretive. The Mahdawīs were still numerous during Akbar's time and one of their leaders even participated in the religious debates at his court.[21] Badā'ūnī's deeply sympathetic treatment of the Mahdawīs when combined with his critique of Akbar's millenarian claims complicates his perspective on the millennium. In short, his views appear to be more complex than those of an orthodox Sunnī shocked at Akbar's heresy.

Badā'ūnī was not unique in giving great importance to messianic claims and millennial notions. So did another Muslim leader from this time, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1033/1624), a Naqshbandī Ṣūfī leader thought to be a great champion of Sunnī orthodoxy in Mughal India. Like the older Badā'ūnī, Sirhindī also served as a court scholar during various intervals in Akbar and Jahāngīr's reign.[22] He is famous today for a compilation of letters containing his Ṣūfī teachings. Some of these letters were addressed to important noblemen and officials at the Mughal court, urging them

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[19] Moin, Challenging the Mughal Emperor.

[20] Qamaruddin, *Mahdawi Movement*; Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements* 68–106; Nizami, *Akbar & Religion* 42–51.

[21] MacLean, Real Men and False Men.

[22] Friedmann, *Sirhindi*.

to adopt the *sharīʿa*.[23] Sirhindī's charge against Akbar and the allegedly corrupt *ʿulamāʾ* at his court was in the form of a general outcry about the dismal state of Islam. He made few concrete recommendations for what exactly needed to be done and why. Nevertheless, he became an important figure in the Indian Naqshbandī tradition and amid rising Muslim nationalist sentiment in the twentieth-century his image was revived as a great "reformer" who had saved Islam from the depredations of Akbar. What this image belies is that Sirhindī's own deep engagement with the millennium.[24]

Sirhindī's reputation as a millennial figure is apparent from his title, the Renewer of the Second Millennium or *Mujaddid Alf-i Thānī*, the use of which became very popular after his death among his followers.[25] His own view on the millennium is somewhat ambiguously delineated in his treatise *Mabdāʾ wa Maʿād*. In this short work, akin to a saintly manifesto, he claimed that at the end of the thousand years of Islam, the Muslim community had lost its spiritual connection with divinity established initially through the Prophet Muḥammad.[26] According to Sirhindī's esoteric interpretation, the new spiritual reality for the next millennium was to be revealed in a mysterious change in the Arabic letters of the name *Muḥammad*, so that its first letter "mim" would transform into an "alif" to become the name *Aḥmad*. The material implication of this metaphysical shift in the Muḥammadan Reality was that Islam was in need of a spiritual renewal under Aḥmad, to reestablish the link between Muslims and divinity for the next millennium.

Although Aḥmad was another name of the Prophet, Sirhindī's use of it in his millennial scheme was made ambiguous and contentious by the fact that his own name was Aḥmad. Unsurprisingly, this interpretation of the millennium engendered considerable controversy during and after Sirhindī's life. Nonetheless, it also became a basis for his saintly reputation. In sum, Sirhindī's views on the millennium, like those of Badāʾūnī, were more complicated than that of the "orthodox" Sunnī image that his followers developed for him after his death. Accordingly, we must rethink the conventional view that men like them represented the "orthodox"

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[23] Sirhindī's letters are available in Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*. These are discussed in Friedmann, *Sirhindi*.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Sirhindī spawned a new branch of the Naqshbandīs in India, called *mujaddidī* eponymously after its spiritual leader, which had a significant career in India and other parts of the Muslim world.

[26] Friedmann, *Sirhindi* 13–31.

Sunnī reaction to Akbar's "heterodox" and millennially inspired religious interests.

Take, for instance, the extensive explanation Badā'ūnī provided in his work *Najāt al-Rashīd* about the spiritual physics that went into the making of a messiah. Much as earlier theorists of the Muḥammadan Reality had stated, Badā'ūnī also advocated a neo-platonic view in which a person with an accomplished soul, such as a committed Ṣūfī mystic, could become the receptacle for an emanation from the divine soul. He called the phenomenon *burūz*, meaning projection (of the soul). In outlining this process of spiritual projection, however, Badā'ūnī followed the teachings of the Central Asian Ṣūfī master Nūrbakhsh (d. 1464) who had been the first to label it *burūz*.[27] Importantly, Nūrbakhsh had outlined his ideas on *burūz* to explain how he had achieved his own messianic status. He had declared himself to be the *mahdī* in 826/1423 in Transoxania and was persecuted for this reason by the Timurid ruler Shahrukh. He never visited India himself but his followers later spread his message in Kashmir, where the Nūrbakhshi order thrived.

Nūrbakhsh's teachings were widely available in the writings of his follower and devotee, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī. Lāhījī wrote a commentary or *sharḥ* of an extremely well-regarded versified work on Ṣūfism, sometimes described as the *summa theologica* of the Ṣūfīs, entitled *Gulshan-i Rāz* (The Mystic Rose Garden) by Maḥmūd Shabistarī. In his explanation of *burūz*, Badā'ūnī referred the reader to the commentary on *Gulshan-i Rāz* and even quoted the following verses by Shabistarī:

> Since the philosopher's two eyes were cross-eyed
> He was unable to see the unity of truth
> From blindness came the opinion of divine anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*)
> From squinting, the realization of absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*)
> Transmigration (*tanāsukh*), for this reason, became a blasphemous lie
> Which, in truth, springs from lack of vision.[28]

These verses, as Lāhījī's commentary made clear, were meant to distinguish the deviant concept of transmigration of the soul (*tanāsukh*), which was associated with radical or *ghulāt* Ṣūfī groups, from the acceptable neo-Platonic conception of the emanation (*burūz*) of the divine soul. In the latter conception, the divine soul could project itself into the bodies of spiritually accomplished men and overpower their souls.[29] This dif-

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[27] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 98–99.
[28] Badā'ūnī, *Najāt al-Rashīd* 83. Translated in Moin, Badayuni 401.
[29] Lāhījī, *Mafātīh* 70.

ferentiation between transmigration and projection was needed because both concepts were meant to explain the same phenomenon, the saintly status and messianic claims of holy men. Indeed, this is how Nūrbakhsh had outlined the phenomenon of spiritual projection to justify his status as the *mahdī*: "a complete soul pours into a perfect being (*kāmil*) in the same way that epiphanies pour into him and he becomes their locus of manifestation."[30]

Badā'ūnī's goal in describing the projection of the soul, and in distinguishing it from other similar formulations widely regarded as heretical and beyond the pale of majoritarian Islam, was to convince his readers that men like the Mahdawī and Nūrbakhshī saints were justified (*mā'dhūr*) and in the right (*muḥiqq*) when they claimed to be *mahdī* or Jesus.[31] When the divine soul overpowered these men, he observed, they were no more capable of resisting it than when a strong lamp overpowers the light of a weaker one. He also noted that if we believe that *jinns* (fiery beings mentioned in the Qur'ān) have the ability to overpower human souls, we should not then doubt the power of saints and prophets to project their souls onto other ones. Badā'ūnī's assertions reveal that although he may have condemned the messianic claims of Akbar, he did not denounce other Ṣūfī masters who had made similar assertions. In other words, he did not reject the idea of the millennium but Akbar's use of it. Moreover, Badā'ūnī was not just a critic of the emperor but also his competitor. He argued that the millennium belonged not to the Mughal emperor but to the saints he was committed to and about whom he wrote so devotedly in the *Najāt al-Rashīd*.

But the matter does not end here. Badā'ūnī did not merely dismiss or condemn Akbar's claim to being the saint of the age or his engagement with the millennium. Rather, he portrayed these acts of the emperor as constituting a heresy of the highest order. He gave the Mughal emperor a role to play in the millennial drama, but this was the part of the Antichrist. As he stated it in his chronicle of the millennial year:

> I see in 990 (1582–3) two conjunctions (*qirān*),
> I see the sign of *mahdī* and that of Antichrist;
> Either politics or religion must change,
> I clearly see the hidden secret.[32]

[30] Bashir, *Messianic Hopes* 98–99.
[31] Badā'ūnī, *Najāt al-Rashīd* 70–83. Moin, Badayuni 397–401.
[32] Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 313; Badā'ūnī et al., Muntakhab ii, 323.

It is to explore the significance of this charge against Akbar, and the form and style in which Badāʾūnī conveyed it, that we now turn.

Badāʾūnī's Chronicle of the Millennium

Although there has been considerable scholarly interest in Akbar's religious experiments and Badāʾūnī's scathing criticisms of them, it has never been noticed that the courtier's attacks on the emperor are mainly concentrated in the description of the millennial year. In the rest of his text, Badāʾūnī writes in the tradition of a court chronicler, maintaining for the most part a respectful tone toward his sovereign. Yet in the year 990/1582, which was astrologically marked by the important Saturn-Jupiter conjunction mentioned in the verses above, his tone and style change abruptly. Before we examine why this was so, it is necessary to summarize Badāʾūnī's description of the millennial year.

Badāʾūnī began the narrative of this particular year by reporting Akbar's claim that "We have found out proofs for part of the reality of metempsychosis, Abū-l-Faḍl shall convince you of it!"[33] Metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul was not only a major aspect of Indic religious traditions but, as mentioned before, was also a key marker of *ghulāt* Ṣūfī groups thought to have irreversibly transgressed the norms of Islam. Thus, Badāʾūnī noted, the emperor "felt at liberty to embark fearlessly on his design of annulling the statutes and ordinances of Islam and of establishing his own cherished pernicious belief." According to Badāʾūnī, Akbar expressed this subversive "design" against Islam in a series of imperial edicts.

Badāʾūnī related that the emperor began by requiring prostration (*sijda* and *zamīn būs*, literally, kissing the ground) in front of the sovereign, which was in clear violation of Islamic principles that reserved this act only for the worship of Allah. Another decree of the emperor that violated Islamic law was the open selling and drinking of wine. Although this measure was allowed ostensibly for medicinal purposes, "a shop for the benefit of drunkards was opened." Badāʾūnī suggested that the real purpose behind the official encouragement of alcohol was to pollute and corrupt the order of Islam because, apparently, "swine-flesh formed a component part of that wine." The implication here was that those who drank his wine were

[33] The section below quotes from the description of the year 990/1582–3 in Badāʾūnī et al., *Muntakhab* ii, 309–31; Badāʾūnī, *Muntakhab* ii, 300–21.

doubly polluted as the eating of pork was also a distinguishing taboo in Islam.

Akbar's overall strategy, Badāʾūnī implied, was not simply to flout the laws of Islam but to pollute the entire body politic. In this vein, he mentioned another of the emperor's transgressions, the legalization of prostitution. According to Badāʾūnī, Akbar not only granted unlawful access to women, but also managed and controlled it. Any nobleman who wanted to sleep with a virgin sent a petition and obtained permission from the court. The result was that "in spite of the rule, all the libertines carried on these affairs under assumed names, and so drunkenness and debauchery led to many acts of bloodshed."

Badāʾūnī also reported that under the influence of Hindus the emperor prohibited the eating of beef. This, in his view, was another mark of Akbar's bias against Islam. He also asserted that Akbar was apparently supported by many others at court. Thus, when the emperor encouraged men to shave off their beards to show their devotion to him, "certain pandering pimps brought forward proofs in favour of shaving the beard. They affirmed that the beard drew its nourishment from the testicles, and that since for this reason they never saw any eunuch with a beard, what could be the virtue and distinction of preserving it!"

Similarly, the emperor, "in contempt of Islam," stopped considering swine and dogs as unclean, and began to keep them in the palace and even to look at them in the morning as a religious service. Here again Badāʾūnī insisted that Akbar had not merely abandoned the tenets of Islam but in fact had instituted their exact opposites. Indeed, his entire description of the millennial year portrayed the emperor acting out a broad logic of cultural inversion and bodily perversion. In this vein, he recorded Akbar's observation:

> The ordinance of washing the whole body after an emission of semen, was considered as altogether unworthy of observance. . . . The sperma genital is the very essence of man, for the semen is the origin of the existence of the good and the pure. What sense then could there be in ceremonial ablution being unnecessary after evacuation of parva and magna, while the emission of so tender a fluid should necessitate. It would be more fit [Akbar argued] that people should perform the ablution first, and then have [sexual] connection.

Badāʾūnī provided a long list of other Islamic norms of social and bodily behavior that Akbar overturned and replaced by their exact opposites. All of this occurred, according to him, in the year of the millennium. Comparing Badāʾūnī's chronicle of this year with that of the official court record,

Abū-l-Faḍl's *Akbarnāma*, one is struck by the difference in the two narratives. Abū-l-Faḍl focuses mainly on administrative measures that took place during that year and there seems to be almost no overlap between his and Badā'ūnī's accounts. What are we to make of this stark disparity? Badā'ūnī may have provided a hint of an answer when, at the end of his screed, he apologized to the reader that he has not observed a strict chronological order for the events described in this year, "which have been introduced as a digression, written down by his rapid pen in an abridged form." Perhaps this was a signal for the reader to read his account of the millennial year, not as a traditional chronicle, but as heresiography.

Badā'ūnī's History as Heresiography

It is a common refrain among scholars of Mughal India that Badā'ūnī's antagonism toward Akbar is expressed so harshly and negatively in his secret chronicles that, at times, it makes it difficult to take his writing seriously or factually. Few, though, have paid attention to the style and metaphorical mode in which Badā'ūnī's laid out his critique of the Mughal emperor's millennial self-fashioning. Rather than simply heap abuse upon Akbar, Badā'ūnī criticized the emperor's "deviancy" using a patterned set of literary devices, adding in the process a half-hidden layer of meaning and innuendo. To detect and decipher this layer, however, we need more than just a close reading of the text. We also need a structured form of literary critical interpretation.[34]

We can begin by asking whether Badā'ūnī was writing his description of Akbar's millennialism in a particular literary tradition. In other words, was he using a "standard" way of talking about heresy in Islam in his description of Akbar's religious pursuits? The goal here, however, is not to question Akbar's use the millennial moment for political effect or even his claim to be the expected messiah, made in terms that were indeed transgressive and heretical from a traditional Sunnī point of view.[35]

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[34] Pre-modern Muslim intellectuals used a literary toolbox of dreams, jokes, poetry, stock phrases and narrative patterns, ranging from simple to complex, in order to encode their own opinion in a chronicle or narrative. These schemes of writing were readily comprehensible to a pre-modern audience or readership. But today we no longer have an intuitive sense of many of these topoi which were readily available to a "native" reader in the past. To see such an argument made for classical Islamic historiography, see Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*.

[35] We know, for instance, from Jesuit sources that the millennium was celebrated festively at Akbar's court. Correia-Afonso, Letters 114–5.

Rather, the objective here is to move beyond an analysis of the "facticity" of Badāʾūnī's writing to an exploration of the meaning stored within its "form." What this shift in perspective helps us see is that Badāʾūnī was deploying against Akbar a major topos of Islamic heresiographical traditions: that of libertinism (*ibāḥa*).

It has been noted that majoritarian Muslim authors, while denouncing heresy, often equated the heretical abandonment of orthodox doctrine with a perverted rejection of socio-moral norms.[36] This conflated charge of heretic-libertine was commonly deployed against oppositional Shīʿa groups such as the Ismāʿīlīs, antinomian Ṣūfīs and others considered *ghulāt*. While the charge of libertinism cannot be taken at face value, the fact that it was broadly and conventionally applied by Sunnī authors against "deviant" groups must be given serious attention in order to understand Badāʾūnī's writing.

The mention of libertine-heretical groups is common in Indo-Persian sources. For example, in the introduction to his work on the intellectual history of Akbar's court, S.A.A. Rizvi discussed a little known "sect" in India called the Ibahati (he translated the word as "one who considers everything possible").[37] Rizvi noted that in the Persian histories written in India before the Mughals, the Ibahatis were consistently depicted in disparaging terms and were often killed or persecuted by the authorities. The distinguishing mark of this group was that they were charged with denying Islam by transgressing religious and sexual boundaries: by prostrating themselves before an image, by drinking wine and eating pork and by committing incest and taking part in orgies. Rizvi stated that the Ibahatis were often identified with Shīʿī and Ismāʿīlīs groups and dismissed the accusations of moral turpitude against them as "credulous legend" resulting from Sunnī bigotry toward the Shīʿa. Nevertheless, he still argued for a historical kernel behind these fanciful descriptions, pointing toward Tantric sects in India that were known to have used sexual acts in their religious rituals.[38] Even if this was the case, it highlights the fact that the multivalent topos of the libertine-heretic was used in Muslim India and led to the confusion in Sunnī writings between groups that were considered Indian "libertines" (Tantric practitioners) and Islamic "heretics" (Ismāʿīlīs).

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[36] For a useful discussion of this topic see Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* 117–45.

[37] Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History* 14–6.

[38] I.H. Qureshi also argues that the group called Ibahatiya in early Indian Muslim sources was a "Hindu Tantric sect." See Qureshi, Ibahatiya.

Importantly, the libertine-heretic topos was in use even in Mughal times. Many of the *Ibāḥati* traits were also used to describe the members of another *ghulāt* group in Mughal India at the time of Akbar: the Rawshani movement. The Rawshanis were followers of Bayazid Ansari (d. 992/1585 or earlier) who was born in Jalandhar.[39] He had declared himself the *mahdī* and a reflection of God and the Prophet. He was known as Pir Rawshan (Illumined Master) and acquired a cult following among the Afghan and other tribes of the rugged mountain region bordering present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. His detractors asserted that Pir Rawshan was inspired by Ismāʿīlī teachings, a charge which is difficult to verify. Most of his works—both poetry and prose—are in the regional language of Pushto. His followers, organized by his son, led a major and long-lived Afghan uprising against Mughal control during Akbar's reign.

The most well-known Sunnī condemnation of the Rawshanis is in the heresiographical tract of a Pashtun religious leader of the time, Akhund Darwaza, who accused them of abjuring Islam and instituting in its place a perverse social and moral order. Darwaza claimed that the Rawshanis gave up all the prescribed Islamic rituals, believed in transmigration of the soul, and considered robbery and pillage of non-Rawshanis as legal. Notably, he charged them with abandoning the normal mode of segregation between men and women and asserted that they practiced their religious rituals in "promiscuous mixed assemblies." Local regional traditions as late as the late nineteenth century went even further, asserting that the Rawshanis practiced incest.[40] The alleged Ismāʿīlī connection to the Rawshanis as well as the earlier *Ibāḥatis* is a significant one, for it points toward a conventional way of describing a group of heretics from a Sunnī doctrinal standpoint.

The Ismāʿīlīs or, more precisely, one politically independent faction among them called the Qarmaṭīs, were for many Sunnīs the epitome of heresy and anarchy.[41] Even Badāʾūnī devoted a considerable section of the *Najāt al-Rashīd* to the Ismāʿīlīs and Qarmaṭīs, warning his readers about the secretive ways in which agents of these groups spread their message and recruited followers. The reason for the Qarmaṭīs' iconic heretical image is

[39] See Ahmed, *Religio-Political Ferment*; Arlinghaus, The Transformation of Afghan Tribal Society 270–330. I would like to acknowledge the late Professor John Richards for directing me to Arlinghaus' dissertation. For a summary of Rawshani beliefs see Nizami, *Akbar & Religion* 61–69.

[40] Ahmed, *Religio-Political Ferment* 88–91.

[41] Madelung, Ḳarmaṭī.

that in 318/930 they attacked Mecca from their base in Bahrayn. That year the Qarmaṭī slaughtered the religious pilgrims, ransacked Islam's holiest site, the Kaʿba, and dug out the holy Black Stone from the cube-like structure and carried it away as a trophy. Moreover, they made their religio-political claims against the established order of Islam using a Persianate millenarian ideology. Islam, the faith of the Arabs, the Qarmaṭīs believed, stood abrogated. In the year 315/928 the planets Jupiter and Saturn were in conjunction and it had been fifteen hundred years since the birth of the Iranian Prophet Zoroaster (*Zardusht*), two Iranian cosmological symbols that signified for them major religious and dynastic change. Attacking and destroying the Kaʿba was the ultimate way for the Qarmaṭīs to act out on earth this cosmological change.

Thus the Qarmaṭīs became the arch-heretics of Islamic history. This is how the eleventh-century scholar Bīrūnī described the Qarmaṭī millenarian episode and their attack on Mecca in his *al-Athār al-baqiya*:

> In the times after Alhallaj the Karmatians [Qarmaṭīs] rose into power. Abu Tahir . . . marched out and reached Makka A.H. 318; he killed in an atrocious way the people who were passing round the circuit of the Kaʿba, and threw the corpses into the well Zamzam; he carried off the garments and the golden implements of the Holy House, and destroyed its aqueduct; he took away the black stone, smashed it, suspended it afterwards in the Mosque of Kufa, and then he returned home.[42]

Bīrūnī stated that the Qarmaṭīs selected a man of Persian origin as their leader, who was supposedly a Magian of royal Sasanian descent. He was from Iṣfahān, the city that according to Zoroastrian apocalyptic legend was the place from which a savior of the Persians was to rise. According to Bīrūnī, the Persian mahdī ordered the veneration of fire, enacted public cursing of the Prophet of Islam and his family, and legalized pederasty.[43] Bīrūnī's descriptions of the type of sexual acts legalized by the Persian mahdī of the Qarmaṭīs are very graphic and seem designed to shock the reader's sensibilities. In his chapter on "pseudo prophets" Bīrūnī also mentions Mani, the founder of the major Zoroastrian-Christian "heresy" of late antiquity and says that "some people maintain that he allowed pederasty."[44]

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[42] Bīrūnī, *Chronology* 196.
[43] *Ibid.*, 196–97. Madelung, Ḳarmaṭī.
[44] Bīrūnī, *Chronology* 190.

In sum, based on how the *Ibāḥatis*, the Rawshanis, the Qarmaṭīs and even the Manicheans were described in the dominant Islamic historical tradition, one can see a pattern emerging. From the majoritarian perspective, such groups signified a threat to the established order in the worst possible way: not only did they upset the cosmological order by denying the established doctrines of Islam, they also turned on its head the normative social-sexual order with their "bizarre" doctrines and amoral practices. All of the groups described in this fashion were those that seem to have expressed their beliefs in Persianate symbols, often against the dominance of "Arab" Islam. Following this literary mode, Badā'ūnī's description of the millennial year was designed to identify Akbar's religious belief with a long line of Persianate "heresies." His description was laced with enough conventional charges—of libertinism, sexual perversion, and moral waywardness—that his readership would have had little difficulty in seeing Akbar as a heresiarch and, even, as the Antichrist.

Why did Badā'ūnī depict Akbar as practicing Persianate *ghulāt* traditions? Part of the answer is that Akbar, inspired by Abū-l-Faḍl and the Nuqṭawīs who had come over from Safavid Iran to seek refuge and patronage at the Mughal court, was indeed using Persianate esoteric symbolism in his millennial ceremonies and rituals of sovereignty.[45] However, no answer will be complete unless it takes into account Badā'ūnī's strong desire to reserve the claim of the millennium for his favorite saints, such as the Mahdawī messiah of India and the Nūrbakhshi one of Balkh, for whom he professed deep sympathies in the *Najāt al-Rashīd*. In doing so, he portrayed Akbar as their opposite, a "pseudo-prophet" and Antichrist, in the traditional Islamic manner—just as Bīrūnī had painted the leader of the Qarmaṭīs five hundred years earlier.

Conclusion

It is instructive to conclude by reflecting upon the story of the tenth-century CE Qarmaṭīs. The Persian messiah of the Qarmaṭīs was not very successful. Perhaps all Qarmaṭīs did not desire such a radical break from

[45] For instance, the contemporary Safavid chronicler, Iskandar Beg Munshī, noted the Mughal interest in Nuqṭawī doctrines and asserted that this was because Abū-l-Faḍl was influenced by this Iranian group and had made Akbar into a libertine (*wasiʿ al-mashrab*) in matters of religion. See Iskandar Beg Munshī quoted in Islam, *Calendar of Documents* i, 124.

their Islamic present, or such a complete revival of an Iranian past.[46] In less than three months, they deposed and put him to death as an imposter. Soon afterwards, the movement also lost its chiliastic momentum and many of its Arab tribal supporters deserted. As the Qarmaṭīs adopted more quietist Ismāʿīlī beliefs, their leaders in Bahrayn made peace with the Ismāʿīlī Fatimids who were politically on the rise in North Africa. Eventually, in the year 331/951, the Qarmaṭīs accepted the immense ransom offered by the Sunnī Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad and returned the Black Stone to the Kaʿba.

The Qarmaṭī-Ismāʿīlī (the two labels are often conflated in Indo-Persian sources) political presence was also felt strongly across the Indian Ocean, in India, or al-Hind as the Arabs referred to it, especially in the western region of Sind. Toward the end of the tenth century CE, the important city of Multan in present-day Pakistan came under their control. From there they were able to maintain links with their Fatimid Ismāʿīlī allies in Egypt via the river Indus which allowed them access to the Indian Ocean trading routes.[47] Even when Maḥmūd of Ghazni put an end to Qarmaṭī-Ismāʿīlī political rule in Sind in 400/1010, the group survived and remained active.[48] Eventually, their secret society in Multan is said to have merged with the Suhrawardiya Ṣūfī order in the thirteenth century CE.[49]

What does a study of the millennial moment in sixteenth-century Mughal India have to do with the early tenth-century messianic uprising of the Qarmaṭīs in Bahrayn? One connection is, admittedly, a historiographical one. The Qarmaṭī episode, as remembered in the Islamic literary tradition, evokes a cultural pattern—acted out in a religious, political and social manner—that can be recognized in written Muslim descriptions of earlier and later messianic movements in Muslim India and Iran. In other words, even though the Bahrayni Qarmaṭīs and their successors in India do not appear directly as actors within the millennial drama that took place more than five hundred years later on the other side of the Indian Ocean, the way in which they are depicted in the dominant Islamic

[46] For an explanation of why the Qarmaṭīs invoked Persianate eschatological idioms and how this may not have had universal appeal among all their followers, see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs* 9–39.

[47] For a succinct description of the relationship between Sind and Fatimid Egypt, see Wink, *al-Hind* 212–18.

[48] Toward the end of the twelfth century CE, the Qarmaṭīs were reportedly involved in the assassination of Sulṭān Shihab al-Din Muḥammad Ghauri, causing turmoil for the Delhi Sulṭānate. See Ahmed, *Religio-Political Ferment* 20.

[49] Wink, *al-Hind* 217.

literary traditions was certainly preserved. This literary technique was used again and again to describe any group or movement or idea that threatened the established dominant order or that needed to be portrayed as unacceptable to the Muslim majority.

Going beyond the literary connection, however, one has to ask the difficult question whether there is a firmer historical connection—one of institutions and inspirational ideas—between the messianic modes of tenth-century Qarmaṭīs and the millennial enactments in sixteenth-century Mughal India. While a detailed answer must await another opportunity, it can be proposed here that the writings of Badā'ūnī point toward a certain historical continuum of messianic ideas and millennial institutions of sovereignty. Indeed, in the context of early modern Iran, it has been argued that elements of Qarmaṭī symbolism—with its Persianate conceptions of cyclical time, cosmological events triggering earthly upheavals, divinity in human form, and zeal for establishing a just society on earth—was part of a "cultural landscape" of the history of the region.[50] The argument presented in this essay suggests the same for Mughal India, which had strong links with Iran and Central Asia.

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[50] See Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*.

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